

# Shakespeare's English Histories

## *A Quest for Form and Genre*











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Shakespeare's English Histories  
*A Quest for Form and Genre*

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*J. W. V*  
*June, 1995*



# Shakespeare's English Histories

*A Quest for Form and Genre*



## Introduction

### I

This book takes its focus and its title from the Shakespeare Association of America seminar at the 1990 convention in Philadelphia which was its impulse. It is graced and made more comprehensive by the addition of commissioned chapters on two of the *Henry VI* plays by Alexander Leggatt and by Naomi C. Liebler. G. K. Hunter's paper in the seminar was already committed for publication elsewhere; he generously came forward with a second paper for this book by way of afterword to it. The seminar came together in the belief that questions of genre and of form in Shakespeare's English histories had traditionally been somewhat slighted in favor of such questions of political doctrine as preoccupied the generation of E. M. W. Tillyard (*Shakespeare's History Plays*, 1946) and Lily Bess Campbell (*Shakespeare's Histories, Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy*, 1947), and since have preoccupied quite un-Tillyardian modes of politico-historical thought, from Jan Kott's political nihilism (*Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, 1964) to Stephen Greenblatt's subverted heroism ("Invisible Bullets," 1985, in Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield's *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*).

The originating assumption, it would seem to us after our common labors for the seminar and this volume, is a valid one. Though every one of us can point to admirable essays on form and /or genre in Shakespeare's histories since Tillyard's time, it is the ideational dimension of the histories that has dominated criticism. If

the distillable ideas of a play are seen to be its controlling purpose, then thematic studies are logically the criticism to engage in; other possible modes—character, for instance, and style, and tone, and, of course, meaningful form and meaningful genre—will be shunted aside. There is no doubt that the reduction of history to politics has had a limiting effect on aesthetic criticism, and that a reaction is under way. In an article by Karen J. Winkler in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* titled “Scholars Mark the Beginning of the Age of ‘Post-Theory,’” Stanley Fish is quoted: “Look for more discussions about a new aestheticism.”<sup>1</sup> We see our book as a participant in those discussions. On the other hand, we would stress at the outset that we have no quarrel with those who think of Shakespeare’s histories as dramas of ideas. Indeed, most of us have thought of them that way in or out of print at some time. What we resist is not the mode but its dominance; we see our book as addressing a need for a different kind of investigation of Shakespeare’s English histories.

For some of the other genres Shakespeare worked in—tragedy, romance, romantic comedy, farce—the aesthetics of dramaturgy had been well mapped before our own age of ideology diminished the number of such investigations; the history plays by contrast had long been thought primarily a mine for ideas about kingship, and citizenship, and dynasty, and social justice, and class conflict—and therefore the recent neglect of dramaturgical aesthetics in these plays is serious precisely because it is in a sense nothing new.

One sees the critical trend and its two principal limitations in a group of books on the English histories from the years 1990 and 1991: Larry S. Champion, “*The Noise of Threatening Drum: Dramatic Strategy and Political Ideology in Shakespeare and the English Chronicle Plays*”; Barbara Hodgdon, *The End Crowns All: Closure and Contradiction in Shakespeare’s History*; Robert C. Jones, *These Valiant Dead: Renewing the Past in Shakespeare’s Histories*; Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History: Shakespeare’s English Chronicles*; and Donald G. Watson, *Shakespeare’s Early History Plays: Politics at Play on the Elizabethan Stage*. Of these five, all but one come in one way or another under the umbrella of the New Historicism, which, as it emphasizes the

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<sup>1</sup> 13 October 1993, pp. A8–9, A16–17.

politico-cultural matrix, tends to diminish the artist's role in the generation of the artistic product. Jones, a percipient traditionalist critic, evokes the elegiac tone and the moral impact of heroic character as it is sought in the yearned-for past in nine of Shakespeare's histories. By contrast, for Watson politics is a theatrical arena and theater a political arena. There are questions of dramaturgy in Watson's book, especially of paradox and disjunction, but all of Shakespeare's choices seem here to be ultimately political rather than artistic. Hodgdon's sophisticated examination of the denouements of Shakespeare's histories confronts questions of form as she suggests that in each of them in the closing of some glorious day a new power figure—a new king—who has been prepared for must be accepted, even if with a sigh. Yet her New Historicist orientation shows in her belief that Shakespearian closure contests the power structures it celebrates—those within the plays and those within the English Renaissance society that the plays reflect. It becomes obvious that cultural politics is seen in this book to be the engine that drives Shakespeare's histories. More straightforwardly thematic, more ideological in their separate ways, are the books of Rackin and Champion, especially Rackin's impressive study, a direct and forceful assertion of cultural politics.

The assumption in four of these five books that Shakespeare's art is subordinate to the ideologies his plays were shaped by must diminish perforce their aesthetic complexity. Also in evidence among these books is a second and corollary limitation of ideologically based criticism in that these authors treat the Shakespearian histories as if they were all of a piece, a single response to societal pressures that finds its expression in multiple installments on Shakespeare's stage of history. The prevailing critical stance has for many years been essentially these two simplifications.

The implied thesis of our constellation of nine essays is quite other: that each play is a complex art object and that each reaches toward art in its own way. As the invitation to the research seminar put it, "Variety in genre and form among his English history plays encourages the inference that Shakespeare continued to grope unsatisfied for a vehicle suited to his ideas about history and politics." It can be argued that except in *2 Henry IV* each play that he wrote about English history is a restless quest, beyond what he had yet

done, for a viable medium for his subject matter. Some plays end comedically, some are chronicles of violence, one is a romance, some are tragedies of outrage or of fate, one is a tragedy of character, one, possibly two, evoke the epic.

Moreover, the formal designs of the plays differ as much as their genres do. Several, especially the earliest ventures, are episodic; two are unified around dominant characters who have between them the second and fourth longest roles in Shakespeare; one of the "one-man" plays (*Richard III*) remains episodic like its precursors, the other (*Henry V*) does not, attaining despite a wealth of incident, a plot that can be called organic, as the essays by A. Elizabeth Ross and Marsha Robinson in this book demonstrate in their quite different ways; one of the ten English histories (*Richard II*) takes the form of a contest and contrast between protagonist and antagonist; in two of them (*1* and *2 Henry IV*) major interest lies, as it sometimes does in the romantic comedies, in a subplot. The possibilities for criticism are seemingly endless. The nine studies in this book can make no claim to blanket coverage of this multiplex critical and scholarly challenge. Indeed none of our essays takes *2 Henry VI* for its primary focus, and there are other omissions as well. But we suggest that the work we have undertaken is a substantial contribution that constitutes an implied invitation to regard Shakespeare's histories in ways that have been somewhat neglected in our time.

## II

The chapters are arranged for convenience in the assumed order of Shakespeare's writing the plays they deal with; the seriatim reader interested in discovering what Shakespeare thought he was doing in these ten plays will encounter accounts of his generic and formal experiments in approximately the order in which he undertook them. Because genre is so often in literature a matter of form, no effort is made here to segregate the chapters on that taxonomy; most essays in this book in fact deal with both form and genre, as conditions of each other.

There are various ways of approaching what Shakespeare did with forms and genres in his histories. One is to look at backgrounds, as Charles Forker and A. Elizabeth Ross do in thinking



each of them about one of the complex ways in which Marlowe's legacy can be seen to interface with aspects of Shakespeare's conception of drama in history. Forker takes a larger perspective on intertextuality between *Edward II* and the early history plays of Shakespeare than those who have worked on the problem before: Shakespeare learned from *Tamburlaine* and *The Jew of Malta* as he was working on the first two *Henry VI* plays, from which in turn Marlowe learned when he devised *Edward II*; this more sophisticated play was the inspiration for some elements of the bad quartos of the *Henry VI* series and of course for *Richard II*, which is different in tone from Marlowe's play, but its debtor all the same. In this unusual symbiotic relationship between two artists grappling with the formal problems a new genre presents, there is a means of throwing light on both dramatists. The Marlowe-Shakespeare relationship is an ambivalent one—a case study in the anxiety of influence.

A. Elizabeth Ross's exploration of Marlowe and *Henry V* sees a quite different relationship, but an equally complex one. *Henry V* deconstructs the heroic ethos that unthinking imitators of Marlowe made popular. The play is, then, a palinode to a Tamburlainian idiom that Shakespeare himself had adopted in his early work, where it was blended with chivalric heroism. In *Henry V* he re-evaluates his own earlier synthesis, measuring it twice: against a commonwealth poetics deriving ultimately from Sir Thomas Elyot's *Governour*, and against structures borrowed from the popular ballad play. A mix of two sub-genres, heroic history and ballad history, the play forces its audience to face the contradictions of these genres and to revise downward some of the adulation for the heroic that can be detected in English public life in the late 1590s. *Henry V*, seen in light of the Tamburlainian tradition, is an instructive instance of genre formation as a function of cultural revision.

Marsha Robinson, also writing on *Henry V*, turns to a quite different background, historiography. She identifies the myths of brotherhood and fraternal enmity, as old as Cain and Abel, Romulus and Remus, and sees them as a primary means of encoding genre. A tragic symbol in both the medieval and classical traditions of the effacement of those hierarchical differences which constitute order, brothers are a recurring motif in the Anglo-Norman chronicles from which they descended to Geoffrey of Monmouth, who portrays

them formalistically, and ultimately to Holinshed and Hall. Fraternal violence alternates with or is superseded by the reconciliation of brothers, a generic formulation which Hall reiterates in his tragicomic representation of the "union of two houses." In *Henry V* Shakespeare implicitly draws on this tragicomic model of the English past, juxtaposing it with Henry's effort to deny or exorcise the tragedy of fratricidal civil war and to divorce his comedic model of history from its tragic counterpart. The play's representation of the Southampton Plot, a tragic episode signifying the recurrence of fraternal violence, focuses on the formal pattern, underscoring Henry's selective fashioning of history, his effort to exorcise the tragic aspects of the mythic configuration of English historiography and to institutionalize the divine comedy of brotherly reconciliation: "We happy few, we band of brothers."

Hugh Richmond sees Shakespeare as a miner of his own ore in *Henry VIII*, a history play which is quite remarkably like *Richard III* in such local details as word frequencies and subordinate plot elements as well as in its larger structural pattern. In both plays a series of lesser falls from power is strung along the career line of the titular character. Both plays make much of sexual exploitation and of mothers' defenses of daughters. Both plays make painstaking use of their sources and both evoke settings so vividly as to discourage modern-dress productions. The comparison undertaken in Richmond's chapter justifies itself in that *Henry VIII* is a sequel to the first steps in the Tudor dynasty at the end of *Richard III*; and Shakespeare is obviously aware of the links between the plays, as he has the Duke of Buckingham, who is condemned as a traitor when servants break faith with him, speak of the analogous death of his father under similar circumstances when he "raised head against usurping Richard" (II.i.108). Once we look at the two plays together, we see that they are very close in content, texture, and didactic purpose. The many connections between the two plays might, when recognized, serve to encourage a redemption of *Henry VIII* from its critical limbo. Most interesting are the differences highlighted by such similarities—the greater positive sense of providence in the later play, the more hopeful view of the human condition. Richmond points out that the perceived analogies between an early history and a much later one are part and parcel of Shakespeare's tendency late



in his career to go back to materials of his early years in the theatre. But Richmond's analysis goes yet further as it faces the challenge of the "quest" alluded to in the title of this book by suggesting implicitly that Shakespeare found something to be satisfied with in what he had achieved in so early a history play as *Richard III* and returned to the form of the earlier play when he wanted to marry *De Casibus* tragedy to tragicomic romance in *Henry VIII* at the end of his career.

Joseph Candido puts biblio-textual study at the service of aesthetic criticism of form and genre. He points out that of the fifteen hundred "excessively bad" lines that Alexander Pope degrades to the bottom of the page in his first edition of Shakespeare (1723), nearly ten percent of the total come from *King John*, and the bulk of these are from speeches of Constance. Building on the contentions of Felicity Rosslyn in her essay on Pope's *Epistle to a Lady* that the poem displays Pope's location of "formless" bad art with the female, the chapter argues that similar assumptions may very well be evident in his textual manipulation of *King John*. Pope's degradations and interpolations produce a slightly foreshortened first half of the play, highlighting public concerns such as war and politics at the expense of private emotion. The drama that results thus coincides more closely with Pope's and his age's best notions of acceptable dramatic "form," but it necessarily distorts the tension between private life and values and public life and values that Shakespeare uses to enrich the tragic tone of *King John*. An examination of Pope's editorial practice may thus be seen to throw light on Shakespeare's dramatic practice, his sense of form in a history play.

Analyzing an unnoticed but pervasive motif, deeply buried yet central to the *Henry IV* plays' formal meaning, John P. Rumrich opens a new way of seeing the coherence among metaphorical substance, thematic concerns, and formal characteristics in these two plays. The form of both plays, mediating between the feudal exercise of royal power in *Richard II* and the more modern political practice of *Henry V*, has long been seen as binary (court and tavern, e.g.) but has been interpreted too schematically, too simplistically. A key to formal meaning in these two plays can be found where it has not been sought—in imagery, particularly imagery of feet, of walking, of bipedal life, and of "expedience," etymologically the extrication of one's feet from what encumbers. As it were, in 1 and 2 *Henry IV* one

walks the long distance between *Richard II* and *Henry V*. The Elizabethan ritual custom of annually walking the bounds of a parish in Rogationtide in name of territorial possession is relevant here. There is a price to be paid for walking as freely as Hal does in moving on his journey toward the heroic leadership and the firm possession he will display as Henry V. An emblem for the "expedience" of the play and for what Hal will become is his depiction before the battle of Shrewsbury as ascending onto his horse like wing-footed Mercury.

More directly concerned with ritual as a defining agent of form is Naomi Liebler's essay on *3 Henry VI*. Liebler makes sense of what to some critics has seemed like a mere welter of carnage by applying ritual and its parallel mode, the ludic, together to the actions of this extraordinary play. She turns to the game-theory of Johan Huizinga and finds that it makes a remarkably close fit. The crown, the bone of contention, is referred to in this play far more often than in any other play of Shakespeare; yet it gradually diminishes in absolute significance until we witness warfare and political struggle stripped of ideology (as a game may be stripped of any significance other than winning). Games have much in common with rituals, and therefore the liminality of Victor Turner and the sacralized violence of René Girard are both also valid perspectives from which to see the strange symmetries, inversions, and structural paradoxes of the third of Shakespeare's *Henry VI* plays.

Alexander Leggatt takes a formal component of Shakespeare's earliest histories, the death of a father and son, and shows how forcefully it contributes to the formation of the tragic genre. The display instance is a tragic high point in *1 Henry VI*, the deaths of the Talbots, father and son. Here the form of the verse, the orchestration of the deaths by anticipation, the role of family and of honor, and the paradoxes of life and death that dominate the death scenes all provide a central emphasis that caught the attention of Thomas Nashe and of the spectators he describes. But the formal role of the Talbots' deaths in *1 Henry VI* is not all—Shakespeare goes on to echo this scene parodically or with bitter reminiscence later in this play (Joan and her shepherd-father) and in several scenes in *2 Henry VI* and especially *3 Henry VI*. Shakespeare did not return to father-son deaths in quite the same way in later plays. The deaths of the Talbots tell us what he thought of tragic death early in his career: the deepest tragedy comes from the most intimate relations.

Coming last, George Hunter's "Notes on the Genre of the History Play" is appropriately more philosophical and more universal than any of the chapters that precede it. It implicitly reminds us that we must focus on dramatic genres not just as an exercise in taxonomy but also and especially as a concern with the relation between dramaturgy and subject matter. An instructive analysis of Iago's role as villain in the plot of *Othello* shows how Shakespeare contributed to Cinthio's disjointed narrative (which takes on architectonic meaning only in its closure) a tight interconnection between events and motives at every point along the narrative line of his story. In like manner Shakespeare earlier added motive and therefore ongoing meaning to Holinshed. The history play, then, in this formulation, lies somewhere between story and history. Actually, Hunter takes us further, as he asks at the outset whether history is a record of what happened or whether it is "what happened" as interpreted through time. And what should we make of the relation between *kairos* and *chronos* in historiography, whether narrative or dramatic? Such questions are as much philosophical as practical and instructively open-ended. We are fittingly left at the end of this book with a chastening reminder of how broad our chosen field is.

### III

The introduction to a book that purports to offer and encourage a change of direction for scholarship and criticism ought to do more than say what has been the limiting model and what new directions the following chapters move in. We should say what we do not do as well as what we do, and what others have not done. In the space that remains some broad outlines can be sketched, not so much by way of manifesto as by way of invitation.

It seems a fruitful activity to look further for formal, perhaps for generic, connections between pairs or groups of plays among Shakespeare's English histories. What John P. Rumrich and Hugh Richmond have done with, respectively, the *Henry IV* plays, and the *Richard III* and *Henry VIII* pairing might be attempted in other instances. If 1 and 2 *Henry IV* and *Henry V* are about the making of a king who is somehow both ideal and flawed, could we not see

*Henry VIII* as about just this process telescoped into one play? Could we argue that Henry V's contempt for the idol ceremony that in a real sense was Richard II's undoing is a moral attitude that Henry VIII must acquire before he can be a valid king?

Again, G. K. Hunter makes provocative suggestions in his "Notes on the Genre of the History Play" about the two tetralogies as a coherent art object. Could we not pursue this line of inquiry by contemplating the analogy between the culmination of the Yorkist tetralogy—after a decisive battle, in a peace-marriage between members of the warring houses—and the culmination of the Lancastrian tetralogy—after a decisive battle, in a peace-marriage between members of the warring royal families? Moreover, the *telos* in marriage in both of these plays suggests further analogies to the Shakespearian romantic comedies. Should we not accordingly look for other marks of a tragicomic structure in each of the tetralogies, since they begin tragically but end comedically? In short, are these two tetralogies, so often contrasted by critics as artistic groupings, more alike than has been thought?

To what extent can we legitimately discern history itself as a shadowy presence in each of Shakespeare's history plays, a force and an antagonist not unlike fate in Greek drama that produces tragedy when men oppose its supernal will. It has been argued that providence planning the Tudor dynasty is such a force in such a play as *Richard III*; but one might go well beyond Tillyardism to envision a tragic or comedic dramaturgy that shows men sinking or swimming in the tide of times. This is the vision Wolsey has of his own tragic story in III.ii.359–65 of *Henry VIII*; and I once argued that Shakespeare envisions Roman history in this way—as a *Fatum*, the catalyst in the tragedies of such figures as Coriolanus, Antony, and Brutus.<sup>2</sup>

In sum, we envision other rewarding validities beyond what we ourselves have done here. This book is therefore a milestone and a signpost, not the end of a scholarly journey.

J. W. V.

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<sup>2</sup> "Cracking Strong Curbs Asunder: Roman Destiny and the Roman Hero in *Coriolanus*." *English Literary Renaissance* 13 (1983): 58–69.



Alexander Leggatt

## The Death of John Talbot

Our habitual division of Shakespeare's plays into comedies, histories, and tragedies, each play fitting one category, is largely based on the Folio of 1623. But title-page evidence suggests that in Shakespeare's time the lines could be drawn differently and the divisions were not so absolute. The Quarto texts of *Richard III* and *Richard II* identify them as tragedies. The play we know as *3 Henry VI* was first published as "*The true Tragedie of Richard Duke of Yorke, and the death of good King Henrie the Sixt. . .*" *King Lear* in its Quarto version is a "*True Chronicle Historie*." The Folio division that has shaped our thinking probably does not reflect the way Shakespeare himself thought of his plays. Certainly the layout of the Folio obscures the fact that the history play as a genre, while it sometimes goes its own way, frequently intersects with the established, traditional genres of tragedy and comedy—for Shakespeare, more often with tragedy. The plays the Folio presents as the *Henry VI* trilogy function also as a collection of individual tragedies in the manner of *The Monk's Tale* and *The Mirror for Magistrates*. The title page of *The true Tragedie of Richard Duke of York* also advertises the play's second major death, that of Henry VI, and the two deaths get equal billing in the running titles. The title page of "*The First part of the Contention betwixt the two famous Houses of Yorke and Lancaster*" goes on to list the deaths of Gloucester, Suffolk and Winchester. A

title page functions as a blurb, and Shakespeare's public liked a good death scene. But in addition to being a come-on, the title page is a fair reflection of the contents. In this early experiment in historical drama Shakespeare evidently found himself thinking of history, in part, as a series of tragedies. Only in part, of course. The fact that it is a series, not the story of one hero, marks a break with the usual dramatic form of tragedy (though it may also anticipate such Jacobean group tragedies as *Women Beware Women* and *The White Devil*). The way the story sweeps on past the deaths of even the most important characters forms a distinction between history and tragedy that Shakespeare goes on using in later plays. What we have in the *Henry VI* trilogy is an intersection of two forms, tragedy and history, each one shaping and affecting the other. The heroes of individual tragedies are brought down by historical forces. Humphrey of Gloucester is a key example: it is not so much his own *hamartia* that undoes him as the fact that his political enemies are too strong for him, and the kind of civil order he represents is crumbling as England slips into anarchy. At the same time an interest in tragedy makes the play pause over the fates of individuals in a way that the simple chronicling of events would not require. In 2 *Henry VI*, the deaths of Gloucester and Suffolk slow the action down, as each death is held in a freeze-frame to let us contemplate it before the pace picks up again and history moves on. It is as though history and tragedy took place at different speeds, tragedy being the slower; or as though each individual death made time stop for a while to let us contemplate human fate *sub specie aeternitatis*.

The first striking episode of this sort is the death of Talbot in 1 *Henry VI*, which seems designed as the climax of that play. We have no Quarto version in this case, but if we did it would not be surprising to find it called something like *The Famous Life and Lamentable Death of Lord Talbot Earl of Shrewsbury*. In a much-quoted passage, Thomas Nashe testifies to the power Talbot's death had over the play's first audience:

How would it have joyed brave *Talbot* (the terror of the French) to think that after he had lain two hundred years in his tomb, he should triumph again on the stage, and have his bones new embalmed with the tears of ten thousand spectators at least, (at several times) who, in the tragedian

that represents his person, imagine they behold him fresh bleeding!<sup>1</sup>

The focus on Talbot as a national hero ("the terror of the French") whose death was "the last stand of English chivalry,"<sup>2</sup> whose final defeat was a defeat for his nation, makes the scene a communal welling up of grief, even a "ritual experience."<sup>3</sup> At the same time the actor who plays him is a "tragedian." We are watching a turning point in English history, and the death of a hero. We are also watching, I would like to argue, one of the critical moments in Shakespeare's artistic development, a scene that reverberates not only through the other *Henry VI* plays but through Shakespeare's later work, particularly his later tragedies. It tells us how much Shakespeare as a writer of tragedy owed to his first experiments in historical drama. Its importance has, I think, been underestimated: partly because its artificial manner is frigid and offputting to modern readers; partly because we have not fully grasped the significance of the fact that it involves the death of not one hero but two.

The central importance of the Talbot sequence is established early in the play. The first scene reports two critical events: the death of Henry V, and the defeat and capture of Talbot at Orleans. In the development of the scene the second event displaces the first in importance, and foreshadows Talbot's end. At Orleans he is betrayed by the desertion of Falstaff; at Bordeaux he will be betrayed by York and Somerset who, locked in their own squabble, refuse to send him aid. The last Talbot episode circles back to the first, giving a sense of tragic inevitability. Early in the play Joan la Pucelle breaks off a combat with him and walks away, declaring, "Talbot, farewell; thy hour is not yet come" (I.v.13).<sup>4</sup> It is as though she knows, through her communion with spirits, of Talbot's ultimate end.

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<sup>1</sup> *Pierce Pennilesse*, quoted from Gāmini Salgādo, ed., *Eyewitnesses of Shakespeare* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1975), 16.

<sup>2</sup> David Riggs, *Shakespeare's Heroical Histories* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1971), 109.

<sup>3</sup> J. P. Brockbank, "The Frame of Disorder—'Henry VI,'" in John Russell Brown and Bernard Harris, eds., *Early Shakespeare* (London: Arnold, 1961), 74.

<sup>4</sup> All references to Shakespeare are to *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. David Bevington (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman, and Company, 1980).

When we come to that end the play slows down and its concentration tightens. According to Robert Y. Turner, "The plotting indicates that Shakespeare intends these scenes to be the emotional high point of the play. As nowhere else he devotes three scenes to preparation." He also introduces a new character, "who has never before appeared or even been mentioned in the play,"<sup>5</sup> Talbot's son John. In dramatic terms, he is born only to die. In that way he resembles Young Cato in *Julius Caesar* or Young Siward in *Macbeth*. They too are the sons of famous fathers, and that is about all we get to know of them. But while they flash through their plays very briefly, John Talbot is held up, like his father, for contemplation, and though Nashe does not mention him, his tragedy and his father's are bound together in a sequence that made Elizabethan audiences weep.

John has the same fated quality as his father does. The first reference to him comes from Lucy, whose frustrated attempts to rouse York and Somerset to action show the net tightening around Talbot:

Then God take mercy on brave Talbot's soul,  
And on his son young John, who two hours since  
I met in travel toward his warlike father!  
This seven years did not Talbot see his son,  
And now they meet when both their lives are done.  
(IV.iii.34-38)

In later Shakespeare, family reunions will create the ultimate images of fulfillment in comedy and romance; the Talbot reunion is marked by death, as though John, in finding his father, has found his own doom. Moreover, this is how John finds and asserts his identity. He is his father's son, and that is all he is; as his father's son, all he can do is die:

Is my name Talbot? And am I your son?  
And shall I fly? O, if you love my mother,  
Dishonor not her honorable name  
To make a bastard and a slave of me!  
The world will say he is not Talbot's blood,

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<sup>5</sup> *Shakespeare's Apprenticeship* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1974), 25, 26.



That basely fled when noble Talbot stood.

(IV.v.12-17)

The name he finds for himself is not "John" but "Talbot." His mother has no name, no identity other than that of a medium through which the family blood and honor are transferred from father to son. The identity of name leads John to imagine an identity of nature so total it is as though their bodies are fused together, and must act together:

No more can I be severed from your side  
Than can yourself yourself in twain divide.  
Stay, go, do what you will—the like do I;  
For live I will not, if my father die.

*Talbot.*

Then here I take my leave of thee, fair son,  
Born to eclipse thy life this afternoon. (IV.v.48-53)

Talbot's reply sees John's death as foreordained; but John sees it not as a function of a particular time, but as a function of a relationship. In an identification Talbot himself makes twice, they are Daedalus and Icarus (IV.vi.54-55, IV.vii.16). (Was the image suggested to Shakespeare by Hall's reference to Talbot's danger as "the imminent jeopardy and subtile labyrinth in which he and hys people were enclosed"?)<sup>6</sup> John dies as his life is about to begin, doomed like Icarus for being his father's son.

This terrible paradox runs through the whole sequence: the man who gave John life now, for all his attempts to prevent the tragedy, gives him death. John summarizes the paradox with the social ritual, an everyday routine in Elizabethan England, of the child kneeling down to ask the parent's blessing: "Here on my knee I beg mortality" (IV.v.32). Talbot, in giving John life in the first place, has already given him mortality. (The gravedigger of Elsinore began his work the day Hamlet was born.) In the following exchange—

*Talbot.*

Shall all thy mother's hopes lie in one tomb?

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<sup>6</sup> Geoffrey Bullough, ed., *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1960), 3:73.

*John.*

Ay, rather than I'll shame my mother's womb.

(IV.v.34-35)

—the rhyme of “womb” and “tomb” makes the same imaginative connection between birth and death, this time through the unnamed mother. In both cases the play on language universalizes John's fate; we all owe mortality to our parents. The irony is compounded when Talbot rescues John on the field of battle:

*Talbot. . . .*

Where is John Talbot? Pause, and take thy breath.

I gave thee life and rescu'd thee from death.

*John.*

O, twice my father, twice am I thy son!

The life thou gav'st me first was lost and done,

Till with thy warlike sword, despite of fate,

To my determin'd time thou gav'st new date.

(IV.vi.4-9)

This gives new force and immediacy to the idea of Talbot giving his son life, thereby sharpening the final paradox. Later, knowing that he is dying, Talbot sees John's potential for giving *him* life: “Where is my other life? Mine own is gone. / O, where's young Talbot? Where is valiant John?” (IV.vii.1-2). The way Talbot goes from “my other life” to “valiant John” suggests an attempt to bestow on his son the separate, individual identity that John has persistently denied himself, the separate identity that (paradoxically again) allows parents to live on through their children. But by the end of the speech it is clear that Talbot already knows his son is dead. His opening question shows his imagination's refusal to accept his death. The identification of birth and death is sealed with a final play on words as the Servant signals the entrance of John's corpse: “O my dear lord, lo, where your son is borne!” (IV.vii.17).

A related paradox is that John's death is also a rite of passage, an initiation into full adulthood.<sup>7</sup> Talbot makes the point clear in his first words to his son: “O young John Talbot, I did send for thee /

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<sup>7</sup> Marjorie Garber discusses Shakespeare's interest in this theme in *Coming of Age in Shakespeare* (London: Methuen, 1981). She does not mention the Talbot sequence.

To tutor thee in stratagems of war" (IV.v.1-2). He urges him to leave after his first taste of battle, his rite of passage completed: "Wilt thou yet leave the battle, boy, and fly, / Now thou art seal'd the son of chivalry?" (IV.vi.28-29). But John's true initiation is into death. The speech in which Talbot describes his son's full emergence into manhood, rescuing his father as his father had rescued him, shows the young man in his first battle transformed into a powerful warrior:

When he perceiv'd me shrink and on my knee,  
His bloody sword he brandish'd over me,  
And like a hungry lion, did commence  
Rough deeds of rage and stern impatience.  
(IV.vii.5-8)

But this is also the speech that describes his death.

The military rite of passage is described in language that suggests a sexual rite of passage. Earlier in the play, Joan's disturbing power is identified as partly sexual: fighting her is an erotic thrill for the Dauphin, who suddenly declares, "Impatiently I burn with thy desire" (I.ii.108). She has a witch's power to unman Talbot senior, who finds himself incapable of defeating her. Shakespeare imagines her as a witch, and many of the fantasies surrounding witchcraft in his time were sexual. John, however, rejects her with a virginal pride that Shakespeare would later see in Adonis and the young man of the Sonnets. After his death, Joan describes her failure with him:

Once I encount' red him, and thus I said:  
'Thou maiden youth, be vanquish'd by a maid.'  
But, with a proud majestic high scorn,  
He answer'd thus: 'Young Talbot was not born  
To be the pillage of a giglot wench.'  
So, rushing in the bowels of the French,  
He left me proudly, as unworthy fight.  
(IV.vii.37-43)

It is Orleans who takes John's virginity, and Talbot avenges the act as though avenging a daughter who has been violated:

The ireful bastard Orleans, that drew blood  
From thee, my boy, and had the maidenhood  
Of thy first fight, I soon encountered,

And interchanging blows I quickly shed  
 Some of his bastard blood; and in disgrace  
 Bespoke him thus: 'Contaminated, base,  
 And misbegotten blood I spill of thine,  
 Mean and right poor, for that pure blood of mine  
 Which thou didst force from Talbot, my brave boy.'  
 (IV.vi.16-24)

The Talbots dwell so much on John's legitimacy, and on the bond of father and son, that it seems appropriate his first encounter should be with a bastard, as though John, like a Spenserian knight, is testing himself against an allegorical opponent who represents the vice most opposed to his virtue. Appropriately, it is Orleans who, on finding the Talbots dead, wants to desecrate the bodies and has to be restrained by the Dauphin (IV.vii.47-50).

Birth, loss of virginity, initiation into manhood—all these experiences, which ought to mark entries into a new life, mark John Talbot's entry into death. The risk Shakespeare takes in writing the whole sequence in heroic couplets, "a form which Shakespeare never uses elsewhere in a tragic passage"<sup>8</sup> and one "not customary in the formal lament by his contemporaries"<sup>9</sup> has the effect not just of heightening the scene by stylizing it, but of making the Talbots seem boxed in, stymied. The relentless click-click of the rhymes reinforces the point that for John Talbot all arguments are arguments for death; as every other line ending is countered by a rhyme, so every argument Talbot gives for John to flee becomes an argument for staying. As Talbot is trapped at the military level by the French, and by the treachery of York and Somerset, so John is trapped at the level of argument by his determination to die:

*Talbot.*

Thy father's charge shall clear thee from that stain.

*John.*

You cannot witness for me, being slain.

If death be so apparent, then both fly.

<sup>8</sup> Emrys Jones, *The Origins of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 158.

<sup>9</sup> Turner, 97.



*Talbot.*

And leave my followers here to fight and die?  
My age was never tainted with such shame.

*John.*

And shall my youth be guilty of such blame?

(IV.v.42-47)

Stylistically, the Talbot sequence looks forward to plays like *The Conquest of Granada* in which, no matter how often the characters change their minds, the rhyming couplets make every decision they take seem final.

Early in the play, when an English hero dies the torch can pass to his comrades. So it is with the dying Salisbury's last, unspoken message to Talbot:

He beckons with his hand and smiles on me,  
As who should say 'When I am dead and gone,  
Remember to avenge me on the French.'

Plantagenet, I will. . . . (I.iv.92-95)

John's determination to die explicitly blocks that possibility. As Talbot warns him, "In thee thy mother dies, our household's name, / My death's revenge, thy youth, and England's fame" (IV.vi.38-39). When the captured York, about to be killed by his enemies, threatens that a phoenix will rise from his ashes to avenge him (3 *Henry VI*, I.iv.35-36) we know that the prophecy will be fulfilled in his son Richard. But when Lucy predicts of the Talbots, "from their ashes shall be rear'd / A phoenix that shall make all France afeard" (IV.vii.92-93) the prophecy—unusually for the *Henry VI* plays—comes to nothing. Deaths in history are as likely to start an action as to finish it: think of Richard II. The Talbots' deaths, like the deaths of heroes in later tragedies, truly constitute an ending. After this, not only is the English cause in France doomed, but Talbot and his son are forgotten. 1 *Henry VI* opens with an act of remembrance, the funeral of Henry V. It closes with a passage of forgetting: no sooner are the Talbots dead than we see Henry and Gloucester planning a peace treaty, and when in the first scene of 2 *Henry VI* Gloucester summarizes England's wars with France he makes no mention of Talbot. John D. Cox has argued that the *Henry VI* plays were written not in a flush of patriotic fervor at the defeat of the Armada but

as a reflection of the bitter disillusionment that set in afterwards "as the reality of a costly, bloody and enervating war of attrition sank in."<sup>10</sup> This disillusionment may be reflected in the aftermath of the Talbot scenes: the fate of English heroes is to die, and the habit of the English community is to forget them.

Shakespeare's aim, as in later tragedies, is not to explore the future that lies beyond the hero's death but to explore the death itself. The Talbots die apart (dying is the most private, solitary thing we do) and together (it is something we all share). John dies in battle, separated from his father; Talbot dies with his son's body cradled in his arms. The trap has closed and—paradoxically again—this means the dying Talbot can speak with a new freedom. No longer in a back-and-forth debate with John, a debate that always ends one way, Talbot can explore what death, now they have attained it, means for both of them. His mind plays around the experience, shifting and experimenting:

Thou antic Death, which laugh'st us here to scorn,  
 Anon, from thy insulting tyranny,  
 Coupled in bonds of perpetuity,  
 Two Talbots, winged through the lither sky,  
 In thy despite shall scape mortality.  
 O thou, whose wounds become hard-favored Death,  
 Speak to thy father ere thou yield thy breath!  
 Brave Death by speaking, whether he will or no;  
 Imagine him a Frenchman and thy foe.  
 Poor boy! He smiles, methinks, as who should say,  
 Had Death been French, then Death had died today.  
 Come, come, and lay him in his father's arms. . . .  
 My spirit can no longer bear these harms.  
 Soldiers, adieu! I have what I would have.  
 Now my old arms are young John Talbot's grave.

(IV.vii.18–32)

The grinning skull of Death, like the antic that keeps his court in the hollow crown of Richard II, has the last laugh on the Talbots; then

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<sup>10</sup> *Shakespeare and the Dramaturgy of Power* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1989), 83.

they escape him, free in spirit as they were trapped in body. But the triumph is brief. Suddenly Talbot, like Lear with Cordelia, cannot accept his son's death and asks him to speak. He cannot speak, but he can smile. His smile counters the grin of death, but it may also mirror it: just as Macbeth becomes withered murder, a human character transformed to an allegorical figure, so John Talbot becomes the grinning Death of a few lines earlier. Then he becomes (again, like Cordelia) a child cradled in his father's arms. Birth and death fuse; the father's body becomes a grave. As the survivors debate the appropriate response to the bodies—Lucy, with unconscious irony, asks for Talbot by listing all his titles and Joan retorts, "Him that thou magnifi'st with all these titles / Stinking and fly-blown lies here at our feet" (IV.vii.75–76)—the sheer length of the debate protracts the time we have to look at the stage picture of the dead father cradling his dead son. This picture embodies deeper ironies in its fusion of love and death than the obvious ironies of Lucy's debate with Joan. The image of embracing corpses will return in the wedding night in the tomb that ends *Romeo and Juliet* (the only time we see the lovers lying together), the tragic loading of the bed in *Othello*, the terrible *pietà* that ends *King Lear*.

The image of the Talbots linked in death has a more immediate power within the *Henry VI* trilogy itself. They may be forgotten by the other characters—that, in fact, is part of their tragedy—but they are remembered by the play. The image they present goes on reverberating. The first strong echo takes the form of parody. Shakespeare understood, as Marx did, that all great historical events are played twice: once as tragedy, once as farce. All through *1 Henry VI* Talbot has been contrasted, explicitly and implicitly, with Joan la Pucelle, the English hero and the French witch. The contrast is sharpest at the end when Joan, under sentence of death, is met by her father. Like John Talbot, the Shepherd is a new character, who has sought out his daughter only to find her on the point of death. The reversal of generations is only the beginning:

*Shepherd.*

Ah, Joan, this kills thy father's heart outright!  
Have I sought every country far and near,  
And, now it is my chance to find thee out,  
Must I behold thy timeless cruel death?

Ah, Joan, sweet daughter Joan, I'll die with thee!

*Joan.*

Decrepit miser, base ignoble wretch!

I am descended of a gentler blood.

Thou art no father nor no friend of mine.

(V.iv.2-9)

Joan's response to her father's offer to die with her is to deny the link of paternity that means so much to the Talbots. As John kneels to his father, so the Shepherd asks Joan to kneel to him. Her refusal is too much for him:

Kneel down and take my blessing, good my girl.

Wilt thou not stoop? Now cursed be the time

Of thy nativity! I would the milk

Thy mother gave thee when thou suck'dst her breast

Had been a little ratsbane for thy sake!

Or else, when thou didst keep thy lambs a-field,

I wish some ravenous wolf had eaten thee!

Dost thou deny thy father, cursed drab?

O, burn her, burn her! Hanging is too good. *Exit.*

(V.iv.25-33)

The Shepherd's startling change of tone turns what looked like pathos into savage farce. That tone continues as Joan—eager to live as John Talbot was to die—claims to be pregnant but keeps changing the name of the father. York cuts her off with, "Strumpet, thy words condemn thy brat and thee" (V.iv.84). As in the Talbot sequence, but with very different effect, parent and child will die together.

Once as tragedy, once as farce. One result of Shakespeare's experiment of seeing history as a collection of tragedies is that episodes, sometimes widely separated episodes, echo each other, producing a structure based on connected images rather than a connected action, drawing out the meaning of history on the level of ideas rather than on the level of story. The human bond reflected by the Talbots works one way for them, a very different way for Joan and the Shepherd. And as Joan is replaced by Margaret, Reignier's cool indifference to losing his daughter—



Suffolk, what remedy?

I am a soldier, and unapt to weep

Or to exclaim on fortune's fickleness. (V.iii.132-34)

—shows that the breakdown of piety and natural feeling is spreading, and it matches the farce of Joan's last scene with a wry comedy of its own. In 2 *Henry VI*, the issue of paternity returns in Jack Cade's first scene:

*Cade.*

We John Cade, so term'd of our suppos'd father—

*Dick. (Aside)*

Or rather, of stealing a cade of herrings.

.....

*Cade.*

My father was a Mortimer—

*Dick. (Aside)*

He was an honest man, and a good bricklayer.

*Cade.*

My mother a Plantagenet—

*Dick. (Aside)*

I knew her well; she was a midwife.

*Cade.*

My wife descended of the Lacies—

*Dick. (Aside)*

She was, indeed, a pedler's daughter, and sold many  
laces. (IV.ii.31-45)

Later, Cade produces a grim parody of the joining in death of the Talbots when he orders the severed heads of Lord Say and his son-in-law Sir John Cromer, impaled on poles, to "kiss one another, for they lov'd well when they were alive" (IV.vii.125-26).

The parent-child configuration returns in more serious forms throughout the trilogy. In a notoriously sentimental image, Henry, lamenting the fall of Gloucester, compares himself to a cow unable to save her calf from the butcher (III.i.210-20). But its principal use is to drive the machinery of private revenge, which increasingly dominates the public action towards the end of 2 *Henry VI*. Old Clifford, slain in battle by York, dies with a motto that makes his

death seem a dignified and significant finish to his life: "La fin couronne les oeuvres" (V.ii.28). But Young Clifford, who has appeared for the first time just before this battle, thereby strengthening the parallel with John Talbot,<sup>11</sup> draws a very different meaning out of his father's death as he looks down on the body:

Even at this sight  
My heart is turn'd to stone; and while 'tis mine,  
It shall be stony. York not our old men spares;  
No more will I their babes. . . .  
Henceforth I will not have to do with pity.  
Meet I an infant of the house of York,  
Into as many gobbets will I cut it  
As wild Medea young Absyrtus did.  
In cruelty will I seek out my fame. (V.ii.49-60)

As he carries out the body he compares himself to Aeneas bearing Anchises; but this Anchises is dead, and in Clifford piety has turned to savagery. We see the results early in *3 Henry VI*, when Clifford sets about killing the innocent schoolboy Rutland simply because he is York's son:

*Clifford.*

In vain thou speak'st, poor boy. My father's blood  
Hath stopp'd the passage where thy words should enter.

*Rutland.*

Then let my father's blood open it again.  
He is a man, and, Clifford, cope with him.

(I.iii.21-24)

While John Talbot was eager to die, Rutland, like Joan, pleads desperately for life; and the pathos of the scene darkens into brutality as we realize what Rutland is saying: don't kill me, I'm too young; kill my father.

One of the most striking of the individual tragedies in the trilogy is the one that gives the Quarto version of *3 Henry VI* its

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<sup>11</sup> See Turner, 94.

title, the death of York. Alone, defeated, he recalls how his sons tried to save him:

My sons—God knows what hath bechanced them;  
But this I know, they have demean'd themselves  
Like men born to renown by life or death.  
Three times did Richard make a lane to me,  
And thrice cried 'Courage, father, fight it out!'  
And full as oft came Edward to my side  
With purple falchion, painted to the hilt  
In blood of those who had encount'ed him.

(I.iv.6–13)

But while the Talbots manage to save each other before they die, and come together in death, York finally confronts his enemies alone. He is given, not the body of his son to cradle, but a napkin dipped in the blood of Rutland to dry his tears. The Talbots never wept; the audience wept for them. Whatever the audience does in this later scene, York weeps openly—and so does Northumberland, drawing Margaret's rebuke (I.iv.169–74). The Talbots largely had the stage to themselves, freely displaying their courage and piety, talking of how they encountered their enemies. York is beset by enemies, like a baited bear; he and Margaret engage in a ferocious exchange of insults that replaces the dignity of the earlier scene with a more savage idiom. It is also far more painful. The scene immediately following begins with Edward's question, "I wonder how our princely father scap'd" (II.i.1), emphasizing how father and sons have been separated so that York must face his death alone. Piety, as in the case of Clifford, can act itself out only through revenge, with a touch of grotesque futility as York's sons are reduced to taunting Clifford's corpse, having missed their chance to kill him,<sup>12</sup> and a savagery that matches the deaths of Rutland and York as they take turns stabbing the captured Prince Edward at Tewkesbury.

Prince Edward's relations with his father King Henry are another variation on the Talbot-John relationship, again fragmented into parody. When Henry disinherits Edward as part of his settlement with the Yorkists, the unnatural Clifford rebukes him for unnatural-

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<sup>12</sup> See Jones, 189.

ness, declaring that even "unreasonable creatures" (3 *Henry VI*, II.ii.26) fight to defend their young. When Henry knights him it is a rite of passage, but one that shows the separation of the two men, as Edward takes Clifford's side in the debate against his father:

*King Henry.*

Edward Plantagenet, arise a knight,  
And learn this lesson: Draw thy sword in right.

*Prince. (Rising)*

My gracious father, by your kingly leave,  
I'll draw it as apparent to the crown,  
And in that quarrel use it to the death.

*Clifford.*

Why, that is spoken like a toward prince.

(II.ii.61-66)

Yet there is a curious bond between father and son. When Edward is stabbed at Tewkesbury Margaret laments and curses at length, but Henry's reaction is more striking. Richard, immediately after the killing of Edward, rides "all in post" (V.v.84) to London to kill the King. Yet even before Richard arrives, Henry, imprisoned in the Tower, knows what has happened. Dramatic economy, perhaps; but perhaps it is also Henry's prophetic insight, of which there is other evidence in 3 *Henry VI*. As in the case of York, father and son die separately, but there is a bond between them. Henry's characteristically sentimental image of himself as a bereaved bird leads Richard to develop, and Henry to extend, a classical image that recalls the Talbots:

*King Henry.*

... I, the hapless male to one sweet bird,  
Have now the fatal object in my eye  
Where my poor young was lim'd, was caught, and  
kill'd.

*Gloucester.*

Why, what a peevish fool was that of Crete,  
Who taught his son the office of a fowl!  
And yet, for all his wings, the fool was drown'd.

*King Henry.*

I, Daedalus; my poor boy, Icarus;

Thy father, Minos, that denied our course;  
The sun that sear'd the wings of my sweet boy,  
Thy brother Edward; and thyself the sea  
Whose envious gulf did swallow up his life.

(V.vi.15-25)

It is significant that this echo of the scene that has given the strongest image of the human bond in *Henry VI* is followed not only by Richard's murder of Henry (we have gone from the final defeat of the English army in France to the murder of the English king in London) but by Richard's ultimate denial of all human ties: "I am myself alone" (V.vi.83). (The Quarto version of his soliloquy includes a specific denial of the link that bound the Talbots: "I had no father, I am like no father.") He goes on, in grim asides in the final scene, to threaten his brother's newborn son.

The most terrible echo of the Talbot scenes is the Towton allegory. The identification of its principal characters as a son who has killed his father and a father who has killed his son makes the main point with piercing simplicity, but Shakespeare does not stop there. While the Talbots were driven by an old-fashioned code of honor, the Son and Father have killed, not just in feudal obedience, but more particularly for money. The Son, before he realizes whom he has killed, declares,

Ill blows the wind that profits nobody.  
This man, whom hand to hand I slew in fight,  
May be possessed with some store of crowns. . . .

(3 *Henry VI*, II.v.55-57)

The Father begins in a similar vein: "Thou that so stoutly hast resisted me, / Give me thy gold, if thou hast any gold" (II.v.79-80). They are in this war, like ordinary sensible people, for what they can get out of it. Their motives are those of Pistol and his cronies in *Henry V*. This only sharpens the horror, since it turns them from the cardboard cutouts they might have been to people we can recognize. It also sharpens the parody of the Talbot sequence, a parody that is strengthened by a number of echoes. One is the paradox of the father who gives his son both life and death. The Son declares, "And I, who at his hands receiv'd my life, / Have by my hands of life bereaved him" (67-68); and the Father, "O boy, thy father gave



thee life too soon, / And hath bereft thee of thy life too late!" (92-93). The unseen wives and mothers are also involved, but not this time as conduits of honor:

*Son.*

How will my mother for a father's death  
Take on with me and ne'er be satisfied!

*Father.*

How will my wife for slaughter of my son  
Shed seas of tears and ne'er be satisfied! (103-6)

Finally, the *pietà* of father and son is recalled:

*Son.*

I'll bear thee hence, where I may weep my fill. . . .

*Father.*

These arms of mine shall be thy winding sheet. . . .  
(113-14)

Whatever dignity there may be in the image is lost in pain and horror; and, as in the death of York, the weeping spectator is now on stage in the person of the King: "Weep, wretched man, I'll aid thee tear for tear" (76). They give no sign of hearing him, or of hearing each other. As the Talbots die separately and together, this is a scene of group tragedy in which all three figures suffer together, and alone.

While the Towton scene seems to most modern readers more powerfully written than the death of Talbot,<sup>13</sup> it draws some of its power from its memories of that earlier scene. By the same token the individual tragedies of the *Henry VI* trilogy, though they are fixed, held, and isolated, are also involved with each other, and are all episodes in the tragedy of England. Though a father-son confrontation is central to *Henry IV*, and the death of Hotspur (abandoned by his father Northumberland) is an individual tragedy after which history sweeps on, Shakespeare never quite returned to this method again. Even in *Henry VIII*, the play that comes closest, the individual

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Robert B. Pierce, *Shakespeare's History Plays: The Family and the State* (n.p.: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1971), 72-3.

falls of Buckingham, Katharine and Wolsey seem to be contributing more to a tragicomedy than to a tragedy. But it gave Shakespeare a way of thinking about history as a series of individual stories that are also the stories of a group, in which no one finally suffers alone (the blows that kill Richard II also destroy any chance that Henry IV will have a peaceful reign) and public events take domestic configurations, as in Henry V's wooing of the French princess, which stands for his conquest of France.

As *Henry VI* is both history and tragedy, so the death of John Talbot in particular feeds more directly into the later tragedies, though it is beyond the scope of this essay to offer more than a few suggestions as to how this happens. The rite of passage that ends in disaster returns in the near-contemporary *Venus and Adonis* where Adonis, challenged to prove his manhood with Venus, would rather prove it in the hunt, and the result is the grotesque love-death inflicted by the boar. Like John Talbot he is a virgin, just at the start of his manhood, and he gets no further. Romeo takes Tybalt's life and Juliet's virginity on the same day; both are rites of passage for him, and identify their love as death-marked. Macbeth has proved his manhood in battle, but still has to prove it to Lady Macbeth by killing Duncan. But the killing leads only to a sterile kingship, "No son of mine succeeding" (III.i.63), and to his own death. The rite of passage fails. The close bonding of the Talbots is recalled in *Titus Andronicus*. The mutilation of Lavinia is designed to destroy her as a social being by denying her language; the family group responds by tightening around her as never before, and Titus, whose relationship with her has previously been so formal, develops an intimate bond with her. He claims that he can read her thoughts, and when he kills her it is—in most productions—a matter agreed between them. Yet though the text allows that possibility it does not dictate it; and we can never be sure that Titus, when he claims to speak for Lavinia, is speaking true. Father and daughter, like the Talbots, are together and apart. The final image of the father cradling his dead son, with its grim message that in this world the young die first, will return at the ending of *King Lear*, a play that begins with rites of passage, Lear's retirement and Cordelia's betrothal, that go terribly wrong. Shakespeare's tragic figures are not isolated, titanic heroes with only the cosmos for background; their tragedies come from the most intimate

relations, the most normal passages of life: the need for love, the demands of loyalty and piety, the turmoil of sexual awakening, the need to prove oneself at whatever cost. The Talbot scene is Shakespeare's first exploration of that kind of tragedy. Nashe reports the audience's tears at the death of a single hero; but it mattered to Shakespeare that he did not die alone.



Naomi Conn Liebler

## King of the Hill: Ritual and Play in the Shaping of *3 Henry VI*\*

"Off with her head!" the Queen shouted at the top of her voice. Nobody moved.

"Who cares for *you*?" said Alice. . . . "You're nothing but a pack of cards!" —Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

In *Homo Ludens*, first published in 1944, Johan Huizinga asserted the inescapable relation between civilization and play, by which he meant to encompass both its "joyous and unbuttoned" and its "solemn and pompous" meanings. With respect to the Middle Ages, "the influence of the play-spirit was extraordinarily great . . . not on the inward structure of its institutions, which was largely classical in origin, but on the ceremonial with which that structure was expressed and embellished."<sup>1</sup> The dominance of ceremony in Shake-

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\* This essay began as a paper presented to a seminar on the *Henry VI* plays, led by Phyllis Rackin at the Shakespeare Association of America meeting in Austin, Texas, April, 1989. I am very grateful to Professor Rackin for first suggesting that I explore the ritual elements in *3 Henry VI*, and also to David Riggs of Stanford University for his generous commentary and support.

<sup>1</sup> *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 179, 180.

Shakespeare's historical tetralogies and the game-like or playful forms it often takes are not new to us: the Dauphin's tennis-ball insult and Henry's skillful return-of-serve is a memorable moment in *Henry V*. In the First Tetralogy, they were, however, new to Shakespeare and, according to at least one critic, to his audience as well: Graham Holderness comments on the complicated evolution of the "chronicle" play as a distinct genre, citing Marlowe's *Edward II* as an early example of "very strict adherence to the matter of the [historical] chronicles ... to insert some intellectual consistency into the eclectic variety of a popular genre. Shakespeare himself had already (before his own *Richard II*, and probably before Marlowe's play) gravitated towards this stricter historical form in his *Henry VI* and *Richard III* plays, though still maintaining generic freedom and the liberty of supplying invented incidents."<sup>2</sup> Working towards the forms this genre later took in the Second Tetralogy, Shakespeare experimented in the First with ways of shaping his historical drama by drawing upon familiar forms of ritual, game, and play, sometimes as reciprocal metaphors and sometimes as antitheses. Although the forms may have been familiar, their operations and signals in Shakespeare's plays were in no way unitary. As John Turner has written with great insight,

One glance at the variety of meanings given to "play" in different languages at different periods—or indeed in any one society at any one period—is sufficient to show that we are not dealing with an objectively recognizable category of behaviour. It is a concept which has signalled both approval and disapproval of a child's and of an adult's behaviour; it has had associations with ceremony and authority, and also with mockery and debunking; it has invoked man's highest duties and his holidays from duty; it has spanned the whole spectrum of meanings from law to lawlessness ... ; it has denoted both innocence and experience ... ; it has been used to describe the real and the false, the fictional and the merely fictitious; it has included and excluded ideas of sport,

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<sup>2</sup> "Theatres of History: Chronicle Plays," in Graham Holderness, Nick Potter, and John Turner, *Shakespeare: The Play of History* (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 1988), 20.

contest, and even war; and it has been defined in terms both of chance and risk and of skill and mastery.<sup>3</sup>

Play, game, and ritual, in other words, are easier to identify as structural or thematic elements in Shakespeare than to define or restrict to a single specific and exclusive context of meaning. At the same time, as structural or thematic elements, they cannot be ignored, and they work in the plays as shapers of the audience's or the reader's reception. Attempts to delimit or define such terms as "game," "ritual," and "play" greatly risk an unfortunate and unnecessarily reductive exclusion of the various resonances of those terms and the activities they signify.

In *3 Henry VI* the game is government, war, legitimacy, the totality of the play's concerns. Or rather, these concerns, crucial for any viable political entity, are represented by the form and process of a game, enclosing the forms of certain ritualistic actions. In a properly functioning community, these ritualistic actions would be taken, and undertaken, seriously, solemnly, in a context of belief in their effectiveness. But bracketed within the action of a game, they become travesties, perversions, "play"-rituals, contributions to chaos rather than to the establishment or perpetuation of order. If questions of monarchy, political stability, communal survival could be reduced to the finite and temporary form of a game, at the end of which the opponents shake hands, pack up the ball, and go home, such a representation by Shakespeare would seem realistic and unremarkable. But the questions of politics are not playful questions, and when they are treated as if they were, when the causes at stake are represented as equivalent or indeterminate, it is a sign that something is very wrong, or, as the young Prince Edward puts the issue in this play, "There is no wrong, but every thing is right" (II.ii.132).<sup>4</sup> Shakespeare's choice, then, of the form of a game for the

<sup>3</sup> "Introduction," *Shakespeare: The Play of History*, 6.

<sup>4</sup> All references to Shakespeare follow *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. David Bevington (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1980).

shape of his play reflects, to borrow a phrase from Alexander Leggatt, "England slip[ping] into anarchy."<sup>5</sup>

Shakespeare refined the selected data found in his historiographical sources (primarily Hall and Holinshed) by following them in some instances and departing from them in others, then arranged his selections in the form of a play which in turn has the shape of a game, the whole conveying a sense of the story of this period in England's history as a travesty of governmental order. Students of the *Henry VI* plays have painstakingly traced Shakespeare's adherence to and departure from the historical records, especially in trying to determine whether the plays' "vision" or "theme" is "providential."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See "The Death of John Talbot" in this volume. David Riggs, in *Shakespeare's Heroical Histories: Henry VI and Its Literary Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1971), also notices the movement toward "anarchy" in this play, personified in Richard (90).

<sup>6</sup> Views on this matter have changed during the past thirty years. In the 1960s, Andrew Cairncross asserted that "Shakespeare's general purpose in these plays was . . . to glorify England and assert eternal providence and a scheme for the salvation of England," and found in the pattern of alternating power only evidence of "the standard medieval theme of the mutability of human affairs" (*The Third Part of King Henry VI* [London: Methuen and Company, 1964], I, lix-lx); Irving Ribner noted the play's episodic structure as a continuation of the medieval dramatic traditions of morality plays and interludes, but saw this as evidence of Shakespeare's novitiate; the plays, moreover, were Shakespeare's warning to the queen of the possible consequences of her failure to nominate her successor (*The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare* [London: Methuen and Company, 1965], 95-97). By the early 1970s, however, the critical attitude had generally shifted away from the providentialist/monitory reading of the *Henry VI* plays. Henry Ansgar Kelly meticulously traced Shakespeare's use of Hall, Holinshed, and others, and concluded that "the plays cannot be said to illustrate as themes either the providential punishment of the house of Lancaster or the divine approval of the house of York," and regarded "opinions concerning the providential outcome of solitary events as characterizing only the sentiments of the speakers at the time in which they speak them, and not Shakespeare's own view . . . [given the characters'] tendency to ascribe misfortunes to Fortune and fortunate events to God" (*Divine Providence in the England of Shakespeare's Histories* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1970], 276, 272); in 1971 David Riggs argued that a "providential design is visible, for the most part, only as a bare outline of the events that Shakespeare selected from the chronicles," and found instead that all three plays share "one very general theme: the gradual deterioration of heroic idealism between the Hundred Years' War and the Yorkist accession" (*Shakespeare's Heroical Histories*, 5, 97). Most recently, Phyllis Rackin has seen a clear division between the three *Henry VI* plays and their culmination in *Richard III*. "The first three



Interrogation of the providential theme has dominated criticism of this tetralogy throughout its critical history, and indeed it is difficult to avoid it. Examining the *form* of the play, however, as an entity in itself that speaks cognitively to its audience of whatever political or interpretive persuasion, offers a mediation of the play's providentialist/Machiavellian images. Much of the action in *3 Henry VI* is attributed *by the characters* to personalities and personal behaviors, present or ancestral; it may be impossible to determine whether these personalities behave as they do because "Providence" made them that way or because history is seen as the story of human actions played out in a "revenger's" pattern of thrust and riposte. When "meaning" and "theme" elude critical consensus, we are left with the pattern of the play as the clearest observable datum. Observing the episodic design of the play need not demand accommodation to or assignment of a particular thematic "reading." As both presentation and representation, the play makes its statement through its structure. That may, of course, have been precisely Shakespeare's intention in design: anarchy, political chaos, *has* no meaning, and defies attribution to an ordering cause. As Raymond Williams has put it, Elizabethan and Jacobean drama often presents the "form of total crisis"; in the "formal qualities of the dramatic mode . . . real social relations were specifically disclosed."<sup>7</sup>

There is not a single moment in *3 Henry VI* in which we can see any operation of stable government. From the opening line, Warwick's "I wonder how the King escap'd our hands," it is all scrim-

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plays are set in a Machiavellian universe. . . . [T]heir episodic plots depict an increasingly chaotic and meaningless world and an action that seems devoid of ethical significance or providential purpose until it is explained in retrospect in *Richard III*" (*Stages of History: Shakespeare's English Chronicles* [Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1990], 62). John D. Cox offers a very interesting discussion of these changes in critical perspective, in the context of an assessment of Shakespeare's relation to his medieval dramatic antecedents, in Chapter 5, "Inventing Secular History: the *Henry VI* Plays," in *Shakespeare and the Dramaturgy of Power* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> *Culture* (Glasgow, 1981), 159, 158. Quoted in Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984), 3.

mage,<sup>8</sup> a dizzying alternation of powers that continues, with a particular acceleration in Act IV, to the end of the play. The play is shaped like a game in which alternate control of the prize is the essential dynamic; specifically, it is shaped like a game that uses a political metaphor, a game such as Capture-the-Flag or King-of-the-Hill that does not end with the first victory but continues as long as there are contestants with the energy and willingness to play. Every other scene of the first five (that is, I.i, I.iii, and II.i) opens with the same point: I.i.1 is noted above; I.iii has Rutland's "Ah, whither shall I fly to scape their hands," and II.i begins with Edward's "I wonder how our princely father scap'd, / Or whether he be scap'd away or no. . . ." Unlike the plays of the Second Tetralogy, interest in the First is centered in the *play* of politics, in the shape of the action rather than in the complex characters of the *dramatis personae*. Whereas in *Richard II* we see a solemn, even painful passage of the crown from one resident king to another, in *3 Henry VI* the regal trophy is repeatedly passed back and forth between Henry and Edward, with Margaret, Clarence, and Richard serving as opposing coaches, and Warwick as chief referee, the "setter up and plucker down of kings" (II.iii.37, III.iii.157, and III.iii.262-63). The pace of the game is stepped up from IV.iii to IV.vi, inclusive. These are very short scenes (64, 35, 29, and 102 lines, respectively); all together they could have made one relatively brief moment. The staccato of separate scenes intensifies the to-and-fro status of the prize. Before this series of scenes has ended, Edward's release from captivity is already planned (IV.v); by the last line of that scene, he has sworn to "repossess the crown"; by IV.vi he has escaped, and by IV.viii, he is "up" again and captures Henry.

The game-like energy of this play is further carried in the ways kingship and its attendant issues of loyalty, control, and even the props of monarchy are handled. It helps to think of children's games

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<sup>8</sup> The analogy to the modern game of football is neither fanciful nor altogether anachronistic. Roy Palmer records a game of "football 'of a sort' . . . of the ancient kind, involving a contest between large numbers of people, with very few rules. [At Atherstone in Shakespeare's Warwickshire] it is played on Shrove Tuesdays, and is said to have originated in a match for a bag of gold between the men of Warwickshire and Leicestershire, in the time of King John." See *The Folklore of Warwickshire* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1976), 112.



in considering this, because values that adults think of abstractly, like the *principles* of kingship and loyalty, and the metonymy of regal props, are treated in this play with the concreteness typical of children. Allegiance to a monarch, for example, depends, in this play, upon the behavior of that monarch and not upon the abstract value of his royal position. Warwick's piqued embarrassment during his embassy to the French king to arrange Edward's engagement to the Lady Bona is cause enough to shift his loyalty immediately from Edward to Henry (in Hall, it takes several months and several more Edwardian trespasses to turn Warwick's partisanship). Warwick's hurt feelings spring from his egocentricity; Edward apparently had no thought (or at least no words) of him or his mission when he married Elizabeth Grey. But "the setter up and plucker down of kings" is insulted, and that is cause enough for altered allegiance and a declaration of war. There is something markedly childish in that.

Childishness and childlikeness emerge at other points in the play, and are not limited to Warwick. Early on, the mild-mannered Henry faces Richard (the elder), Duke of York, who has seated himself on Henry's throne: "frowns, words, and threats / Shall be the war that Henry means to use" (I.i.72-73). Shortly thereafter, Exeter cowers at Queen Margaret's entrance: "Here comes the Queen, whose looks bewray her anger. / I'll steal away" (I.i.211-12). Rutland, who is actually a child and is therefore entitled to fear a hostile countenance, pleads with Clifford to kill him quickly "with thy sword / And not with such a cruel threat'ning look!" (I.iii.17). At the end of Act I, York's severed head becomes a gargoyle: "Off with his head, and set it on York gates, / So York may overlook the town of York" (I.iv.179-80). Children, whose strength is never equal to their anger, frighten with and are frightened by "frowns," "angry" faces, "cruel, threat'ning looks" and disembodied images.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare again emphasizes the debasing function of the mounted head in Macduff's taunt to Macbeth: "And live to be the show and gaze o' th' time! / We'll have thee, as our rarer monsters are, / Painted upon a pole, and underwrit, / 'Here may you see the tyrant'" (V.viii.24-27). Macduff refers to a serious practice intended to awe, frighten, and dissuade potential miscreants, and he, of course, represents orthodoxy and Scotland's rescue from the murderous Macbeth. But the same image is trivialized, made suitable only for the intimidation of children and gulls, by characters whose actions subvert or pervert normative order, as, for example, when Lady Macbeth

As Huizinga and John Turner have demonstrated, there is a clear relation between child's play and such adult concerns as law, war, ceremony, and other marks of civilization. Noting this relation does not trivialize or diminish in any way the dynamic of those concerns. Huizinga's comments on the relation between play and law typify the connection and, in expanded reference, encompass a variety of other realms of activity.

High seriousness, deadly earnest and the vital interests of the individual and society reign supreme in everything that pertains to the law. The etymological foundation of most of the words which express the ideas of law and justice lies in the sphere of setting, fixing, establishing, stating, appointing, holding, ordering, choosing, dividing, binding, etc. . . . [T]he sacredness and seriousness of an action by no means preclude its play-quality. . . . In Greece, litigation was considered as an agon, a contest bound by fixed rules and sacred in form. . . . Contest means play. . . . The playful and the contending, lifted on to the plane of that sacred seriousness which every society demands for its justice, are still discernible to-day in all forms of judicial life.<sup>10</sup>

When playing loses its juvenile, immature, and expendable meanings it can be seen in (or as) the foundation of all serious cultural operations. But when it retains them in the face of threats to cultural survival, the result is more than "play"; it is travesty. At this intersection of form and meaning, when action has gone awry, some potent form of redress is called for, some ritual or ritualistic action that will set things right and reconfigure the activity toward constructive, or at least conclusive, ends. By casting the most serious concerns of a monarchic community in the shape of a game or contest, *3 Henry VI* also interrogates the relation between play and ritual. Such a relation is either patently obvious (ritual as "playing out," enacting, "actualization by representation" within a designated

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said of her husband's reluctance to revisit the murdered Duncan, "Tis the eye of childhood / That fears a painted devil" (II.ii.54-55).

<sup>10</sup> Huizinga, 76.

space<sup>11</sup>) or apparently impossible to pin down in language. Huizinga backs away from the attempt at the beginning of his study by identifying overt similarities and differences, and chooses to characterize ritual as play because "the ritual act has all the formal and essential characteristics of play" and because "ritual play is essentially no different from one of the higher forms of common child-play ... [which in turn] possesses the play-form in its veriest essence."<sup>12</sup> Victor Turner, writing much later, comes closer to expressing the relation in a way that illuminates the progression we see in *3 Henry VI*. Borrowing from Brian Sutton-Smith's study of children's games (which had in turn borrowed from his own earlier work, *The Ritual Process*), Victor Turner uses Sutton-Smith's distinction:

The normative structure represents the working equilibrium, the "antistructure" represents the latent system of potential alternatives from which novelty will arise when contingencies in the normative system require it. . . . Sutton-Smith goes on to say that "we may be disorderly in games [and I would add, in the liminality of rituals, as well as in such 'liminoid' phenomena as charivaris, fiestas, Halloween masking, and mumming, etc.] either because we have an overdose of order, and want to let off steam [this might be called the 'conservative view' of ritual disorder, such as ritual reversals, Saturnalia, and the like], or because we have something to learn through being disorderly." What interests me most about Sutton-Smith's formulations is that he sees liminal and liminoid situations as the settings in which new models, symbols, paradigms, etc., arise—as the seedbeds of cultural creativity in fact. These new symbols and constructions then feed back into the "central" economic and politico-legal domains and arenas, supplying them with goals, aspirations, incentives, structural models and *raison d'être*.<sup>13</sup>

The "gamesmanship" of the earlier part of *3 Henry VI* is, first of

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<sup>11</sup> Huizinga, 14.

<sup>12</sup> Huizinga, 18, 17.

<sup>13</sup> Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Press, 1972), 28.

all, not the innocent apprenticeship of children practicing lessons for adulthood, but an inverse or reverse structure of adults behaving like children when children behave badly. It is not the "antistructure" Victor Turner and Brian Sutton-Smith refer to, which would be a very constructive praxis. It is, rather, a perversion of antistructure. As such, it works backward, or the play does, towards the perversion of order or structure, evidenced, as we shall see, in the father-son killings, the debasement of the king on his molehill-throne, and the abusive interaction with Clifford's corpse. Shakespeare is not showing us, in this play, the emergence of "new models, symbols, paradigms . . . aris[ing] as the seedbeds of cultural creativity" and emerging as "goals, aspirations, incentives, structural models and *raison d'être*"—not in the play that leads us to Richard III, "a new Machiavel, and a last parody of heroic *virtù*."<sup>14</sup> Instead we see the whole process described by Victor Turner turned inside out. The pattern is present in reverse, as in a carpet turned over. The "new models, symbols," etc., of cultural creativity will be the task of Henry of Richmond at the end of the next play in the tetralogy.

The "paper crown" episode in I.iv is the most powerful moment of formalized play in *3 Henry VI*. In Hall, Holinshed, and Baldwin, Clifford kills and decapitates York, places a paper crown on the severed head, mounts it on a pole, and presents it to Queen Margaret as a kind of jester's bauble.<sup>15</sup> Shakespeare gives York's carnivalization to Margaret, at the end of 46 uninterrupted lines; she makes it a humiliating preliminary to his execution while Clifford stands aside and watches. It is a moment of "play" for several reasons: it is a debased and perverted imitation of a coronation, and she is "playing" with him cruelly for her own amusement.

I prithee grieve, to make me merry, York.  
 What? hath thy fiery heart so parch'd thine entrails  
 That not a tear can fall for Rutland's death?  
 Why art thou patient, man? Thou shouldst be mad;  
 And I to make thee mad do mock thee thus.

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<sup>14</sup> Riggs, 130.

<sup>15</sup> See Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, 8 vols. (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1960), 3:178, 209, 213.



Stamp, rave, and fret, that I may sing and dance.  
 Thou wouldst be fee'd, I see, to make me sport.  
 York cannot speak unless he wear a crown.  
 A crown for York! and, lords, bow low to him.

(86-94)

She leads him, "that raught at mountains with outstretched arms" (68), to stand on a molehill, which makes him for a time King of the Hill. (Henry will voluntarily replicate this position in the next act.) She torments him with mocking references to his absent sons, "the wanton Edward, and the lusty George? / And where's that valiant crook-back prodigy, / Dicky your boy, that with his grumbling voice / Was wont to cheer his dad in mutinies?" (74-77). And then she cuts him metaphorically by swiping at his face with a bloody cloth, a gesture that also speaks ritualistically:

Or, with the rest, where is your darling Rutland?  
 Look, York! I stain'd this napkin with the blood  
 That valiant Clifford, with his rapier's point,  
 Made issue from the bosom of the boy;  
 And if thine eyes can water for his death,  
 I give thee this to dry thy cheeks withal. (77-83)

Napkins dipped in blood are considered sacred relics elsewhere in Shakespeare (see *Julius Caesar* III.ii.133); smearing one's arms and face with the blood of a sacrificial victim (see *Julius Caesar* III.i.106-7 and the rites of the Lupercal) signalled union with the slain and symbolized incorporation of his sacred properties.<sup>16</sup> As part of a rite, blood-smearing denotes honor and a priestly role in the life-giving or life-enhancing function of the ritual. Margaret's action is a travesty, a perversion, a profane anti-ritual. In this matter she appears more villainous than Clifford, but later, for reasons that are ritualistically sound (however politically unjust they may appear to be), it is Clifford's corpse that will be abused retributively by Edward and his brothers, his head cut off and mounted in York's place, whereas Margaret survives beyond the end of the play.

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<sup>16</sup> See Naomi Conn Liebler, "'Thou Bleeding Piece of Earth': The Ritual Ground of *Julius Caesar*," *Shakespeare Studies* 14 (1981): 175-96.





- (York): He rose against him, being his sovereign,  
And made him to resign his *crown* perforce.  
(War.): Suppose, my lords, he did it unconstrain'd,  
Think you 'twere prejudicial to his *crown*?  
(Exe.): No; for he could not so resign his *crown*  
But that the next heir should succeed and  
reign.

164 (York): Henry of Lancaster, resign thy *crown*.

Tired of the exchange and intimidated by the arrival of York's soldiers, Henry bargains unthinkably, and York hits goal with one more "crown":

- 171-73 (Henry): Let me for this my lifetime reign as king.  
(York): Confirm the *crown* to me and to mine heirs  
And thou shalt reign in quiet while thou liv'st.

Henry disinherits his son with a sigh, "But be it as it may" (194). This game period ends when Margaret enters, looking angry. Chastened by her mere presence, Henry and Exeter attempt to slink away (211-12). By the end of Act I, when York, facing death, yields the "crown" to Margaret, it is the paper crown that he takes from his head, but his language can no longer distinguish this parodic symbol from the real, regal one it mocks: "There, take the crown, and, with the crown, my curse" (I.iv.164). Emptied of its usual significance by both reiterative language and alternating possession, the "crown" itself has been carnivalized, trivialized to nothing but a game-piece. If "crown" were "ball," the action of exchange, of possession and repossession, would make sense, but in the carnival world that *3 Henry VI* figures forth, the trajectory of the crown-in-flight as it is passed back and forth is a statement of grotesquerie.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> It seems appropriate to note here that heads (severed) are treated in much the same way as crowns are in this play. York's was set atop the gates of his city as a gargoyle; at the beginning of the play, in an action prefiguring the later "corpse-abuse" of Clifford's body when Edward and Montague show bloody swords as proof of their latest victory, Richard shows Somerset's head and says, "Speak thou for me and tell them what I did... / Thus do I hope to shake King Henry's head" (I.i.16, 20). His language ("shake") doubtless describes his action, similar to what one might do with a jester's bauble, and reiterates the image Shakespeare received from Holinshed, Hall, and Baldwin in regard to York's head, handed on a pole to Margaret (see above, note 16). There is no indica-

Margaret's commanding presence certainly elicits respect from her husband and others of Henry's court. But that respect quickly runs to awe. When Margaret understands that Henry has disinherited their son, she declares herself divorced from him, takes over an army from the North, and dismisses Henry from her sight (I.i.246–50, 258). Even Prince Edward chooses his mother's side. The king who negotiated with York to "reign as king" without a crown does not appear to rule in his own castle. On the battlefield he holds less sway than a water-boy. Clifford asks him to leave the scene: "I would your Highness would depart the field. / The Queen hath best success when you are absent" (II.ii.73–74). He chooses to stay and negotiate with the Yorkists while even his young son urges him to fight (78–80). Weary of his verbal brand of warfare, Margaret orders him to "Defy them then, or else hold close thy lips" (118), which prompts Henry to negotiate with her: "I prithee give no limits to my tongue. / I am a king, and privileged to speak" (119–20). His language—"I prithee"—signals submission; it is certainly not a regal statement, and suggests that, child-like, he fears her wrath. Indeed he says no more until three scenes later when he talks to himself on the molehill. A similar anxious deference to women is shown by the son who has killed his father and the father who has killed his son in II.v. Alternating chorically, the former says, "How will my mother for a father's death / Take on with me, and ne'er be satisfied!" and the latter, "How will my wife for slaughter of my son / Shed seas of tears, and ne'er be satisfied!" (103–6). The poetic Henry, who understands metaphors better than he understands affairs of government, sees in the grieving father's face

The red rose and the white . . . ,  
The fatal colours of our striving houses.

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tion of what Richard does subsequently with the head. The horror that such decapitated heads are supposed to inspire is deflated with the frequency of the image, as Shakespeare later suggested in Antony's prophecy over Caesar's corpse: "Blood and destruction shall be so in use / And dreadful objects so familiar / That mothers shall but smile when they behold / Their infants quartered with the hands of war, / All pity chok'd with custom of fell deeds" (*Julius Caesar* III.i.266–70).

The one his purple blood right well resembles;  
The other his pale cheeks, methinks, presenteth.  
(97-100)

and wishes he were dead (95).

He is, of course, quite correct to see the replication of his country's political crisis in the agony of the father and the son.<sup>20</sup> We can see more: Henry's abdication of power in court and in his marriage is also reflected in the rather poignant concern about how mother and wife, respectively, will punish the slayers. We are invited to see Margaret's power as an inversion of normative Elizabethan political and domestic order: "A woman's general," Richard said earlier. "What should we fear?" (I.ii.68).<sup>21</sup> Margaret's behavior is cited by all three York brothers as the impetus for Edward's rebellion (II.ii.159-76),<sup>22</sup> and again by Richard at V.v.23-24. Several inversions are

<sup>20</sup> Alexander Leggatt's essay in this volume offers a splendid analysis of this episode in *3 Henry VI* as an inversion of the Talbot deaths in *1 Henry VI* and of the connection of both to a variety of parent-child killings in several of Shakespeare's plays. In a different kind of analysis, Ribner, following an early essay by A. P. Rossiter, thought Henry's meditation a "ritualistic" (by which he meant symbolic, allegorical, non-documentary) statement: "ritual drama is not concerned with depicting events; it comments upon events . . . [using] devices allied to religious ritual, and often choral in nature" (97).

<sup>21</sup> The impact of this line as heard by an audience whose monarch was a woman is both probable and problematic. Margaret is defeated and imprisoned by the play's end, but lives, as Richard warns, "to fill the world with words" (V.v.44); her last line (82) is a curse. It should be noted, in sorting out the various aggressions in this play, that Richard seems particularly obsessed with Margaret, while Clarence and Edward focus their energies (and their swords) upon Prince Edward, called the incarnation of Henry V (V.iv.52-53), as a greater threat to their claim than that posed by his father. Shakespeare seems to have controlled his audience's perception of any hints toward his own queen by giving the most vicious imprecations to Richard, against whom Margaret later appears as "the mouthpiece of retribution" (Cairncross, li), leaving Edward and Clarence unsullied by any action against the female other than her imprisonment and return to France.

<sup>22</sup> Kelly draws attention to these lines, adding "it can scarcely be thought that Edward is sincere at this point; . . . or else his present attitude is another example of the way in which this scene contradicts the themes of the rest of the play. For . . . York had plotted to gain the crown independently of any provocation by Margaret in the first two parts of *Henry VI* . . ." (269). His observation serves as a reminder that in the absence of any clear set of values, any cause whatever may be assigned as sufficient cause for retaliation and revolt. Edward closes this passage with a renewed declaration of war: "I defy thee. . . / Since thou deniedst the gentle King to speak. / Sound trumpets! Let our bloody colors wave" (II.ii.171-74), but obviously, as Kelly says, the war has been going on since long before this play began.

powerfully delivered to us in II.v, not only by the tragic loading of the stage with kin-slain bodies (which Aristotle identified as the primary subject of tragedy—*Poetics* 1453b) but also by the placement of the king while all of this is happening. Henry is seated on the molehill of mockery, and in the world turned upside down as it is, King Henry is now King of the Hill, and only of that hill.

When Margaret placed York on the molehill, it was to carnivalize and degrade him. When the king places himself there, the effect is quite different. Outwardly it appears to be a sketch for the scenes of abdication/abnegation Shakespeare was to paint more movingly in *Richard II* and *King Lear*. As in the two later plays, the king, overburdened with the cares of kingship, sinks to the ground and wishes he could trade places with the lowliest and most abject of his people: Richard with an almsman, Lear with a lunatic, Henry with a shepherd. Like Richard, Henry would be happy to count “minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, and years, / Pass’d over to the end they were created, . . . / Unto a quiet grave” (II.v.38–40). Commoners live in time, while kings live in history. Precisely because kings do live in history, that is, because what happens to them matters beyond the years of their lives and becomes the momentous events of the community’s annals, the voluntary abjection of monarchs has seismic impact; the fall of greatness is in fact earth-shaking. Unlike Richard’s, Henry’s fall is not centralized in one part of the play.<sup>23</sup> His molehill is neither Richard’s Flint Castle nor his Westminster, and his decoronation is not the point of his abjection, because in fact he gives up, retrieves, and gives up the crown, as we have seen, several times during the play, as a player would in the alternating fortunes of a game.

The significant action of 3 *Henry VI* is not the uncrowning of

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<sup>23</sup> A different but very compelling view of this moment is offered by Mark Rose, who finds in the pattern of this scene “the key to the conception behind the entire play”: Henry in meditation (II.v) is positioned between “Yorkists fleeing” (II.iii-iv) and “Lancastrians fleeing” (II.vi). As Henry imagines the peaceful shepherd’s life, rendered in the ordering symbol of the sundial, “The regulated, progressive motion of the life he envisions contrasts with the swaying tides of the battle, fortune merely sweeping first in one direction and then another without purpose or goal.” See *Shakespearean Design* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap/Harvard Univ. Press, 1972), 32–34.



the king, but the uncrowning of the crown. The symbol itself is emptied of all of its meaning and turned into a toy. No cooking-pot<sup>24</sup> or wisp of straw is needed to make the point that monarchy is carnivalized in this play; the crown is used to parody itself. Crownless, Henry lacks the sign that would, in a normal circumstance, identify him and distinguish him from other men: "But, if thou be a king, where is thy crown?" asks the Second Keeper (III.i.61). As we have seen, the consequence of the play's action is that the crown means nothing in and of itself; it cannot be a symbol because its referent varies with the possessor. It is merely a "thing," a toy, a game-piece that indicates variously and temporarily how the game goes. Consequently, a man is king by no other rule than the rule of possession. Kingship, along with its golden signifier, is vacant of all reliable meaning. In this play, it is the game, the shape of the action, that matters.<sup>25</sup> Shakespeare's interest is evidently in the shifting dynamics of power and rule rather than in a particular (e.g., Tudor) reading of history.<sup>26</sup> He could hardly have found a better, more accurate metaphor than the shape of a game, whose outcome lasts only until the *next* game.

The father-son killings are offered as mirror-reversed images; the molehill-become-throne also embodies an inverse relationship, and both are offered in the same moment in the play to localize the dreadful consequences when rule is thrown into question, the crown trivialized, and civil war (the ultimate inversion of political order) pits fathers and sons against each other. There is no possibility of resolving or averting these causes; they began in an earlier generation. The quintessential Aristotelian situation is represented here; the familial revenge pattern has all the hallmarks of Greek tragedy. The play rings repeatedly with accusations and justifications based on paternal trespasses. Clifford, stabbing York, reminds him, "here's for my father's death" (I.iv.175); Exeter, in a line noted earlier, charges

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<sup>24</sup> See Michael D. Bristol, *Carnival and Theater: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England* (London: Methuen and Company, 1985), Chapter 4, "Travesty and Social Order," and especially 65-67.

<sup>25</sup> I am grateful to John Velz for identifying this core idea, and for the language in which to frame it.

<sup>26</sup> See, for instance, Kelly, 203.

York: "Thy father was a traitor to the crown" (I.i.79).<sup>27</sup> More frequently than the word "crown," the word "father" appears in this play 68 times, far more often than in any other history play, and indeed more often than in any other play (*Lear* has 57 instances; *Shrew* 54, and *Hamlet* 51).

But unlike *Lear* and *Hamlet*, *3 Henry VI* is not tragedy; it offers no catharsis, and intends none. Indeed, the successive and seemingly endless father-son revenges, hideously inverted to become the parricide and infanticide of II.v., lead nowhere, resolve nothing, as does the national political crisis of which they remind Henry on his molehill. The parodic instances noted above offer no release, purge no tension, empower no disenfranchised population. In the well-known language of Victor Turner, II.v is a presentation of liminality, the threshold quality of statuslessness.<sup>28</sup>

The symbolic power of a crown is ambiguous when its ownership is unknown or perpetually destabilized. The seat of power disappears when a throne collapses to a molehill. The mutually protective bonds and allegiances denoted by "family" dissolve when sons and fathers kill each other. Without definition, clarity, all the premises of civilization are liminal; liminality muddies up the field of play and the game becomes unplayable. In *3 Henry VI* the ultimate evidence of liminal ambiguity is offered in II.vi, immediately following the father-son killings and the molehill-enthronement. In "another part of the field" (s.d.), Edward, Warwick, Richard, and Clarence torment the already dead Clifford when they realize who he is, after promising "If friend or foe, let him be gently us'd"(45). In a choric incantation, as if he could hear them, they taunt:

*Rich.*: Clifford, ask mercy, and obtain no grace.

*Edw.*: Clifford, repent in bootless penitence.

*War.*: Clifford, devise excuses for thy faults.

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<sup>27</sup> See Riggs, 130-32, for a full discussion of filial and paternal revenges in this play. As he points out, the father-son killings in II.v. "epitomize the chaos that results when personal revenges are projected into the arena of history" (132). They also dramatize the horrific, "unnatural" inversion of turning exogenous (extra-familial) killing to endogenous kin-killing.

<sup>28</sup> E. g., *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1969).



*Clar.*: While we devise fell tortures for thy faults.

*Rich.*: Thou didst love York, and I am son to York.

*Edw.*: Thou pitied'st Rutland; I will pity thee.

*Clar.*: Where's Captain Margaret, to fence you now?

*War.*: They mock thee, Clifford. Swear as thou wast  
wont. (69-76)

As simple overt action, these taunts parallel Clifford's verbal torment of the terrified boy Rutland and Margaret's of York before each was killed, and if Clifford were alive to hear it, it would seem no more than retribution. The language indicates an expected response from the corpse, and appears to be a futile release of the urge for revenge. Bullough asserts that "the prolonged ill-treatment of his corpse was intended to illustrate the growing cruelty of the civil war."<sup>29</sup> But corpse-abuse isn't cruelty. It is horrific; it offends the living and perhaps the divine, but the corpse never feels it. In the domain of ritual, however, it expresses something very powerful, so powerful that when the Bastard of Orleans offers to "hew ... to pieces, hack ... asunder" the corpses of the Talbots in *1 Henry VI*, he is prevented by the Dauphin's order not to "wrong" the life those bodies once contained (IV.vii.47-50).<sup>30</sup> The sacrilegious act Shakespeare declined to represent in the first part of *Henry VI* is ventured here in the third, by which time in the narrative frame of the tetralogy the crisis of government has accelerated and intensified. Clifford's body is not only defiled, but defiled in mockery, in sport. A corpse represents simultaneously the sacred and the taboo.<sup>31</sup> Its impending putrefaction threatens the community at the same time that it serves as a mnemonic of the life just extinguished and perhaps of the life beyond. Intentional interaction with a corpse blurs the crucial distinction between the living and the dead. It constitutes an extreme ambiguity that is dangerous to "the hierarchy of values [which is] dramatically undermined by paradox and contradic-

<sup>29</sup> Bullough, 3:161.

<sup>30</sup> I am indebted for this observation to Alexander Leggatt's essay, in this volume.

<sup>31</sup> The extreme taboo represented by a corpse even to its own murderer can be seen again in Macbeth's refusal to return to Duncan's corpse in order to inculcate the sleeping grooms: "I am afraid to think what I have done; / Look on't again I dare not" (II.ii.51-52).

tion. . . . Therefore we find corruption enshrined in sacred places and times."<sup>32</sup> But in this play, nothing whatever is sacred.

Following Mary Douglas's direction, René Girard elaborates the significance of the lost distinction between the living and the dead, "sometimes regarded as the consequence of the crisis and sometimes as its cause."<sup>33</sup> In the light of Girard's further discussion, the dead Clifford may be seen as Henry's and Margaret's surrogate, in recognition of his role in the protracted and ritualized executions of the child Rutland and his father York. Girard explains the function of surrogates in ritual. They

tend to be drawn from categories that are neither outside nor inside the community, but marginal to it: slaves, children, livestock. This marginal quality is crucial to the proper functioning of the sacrifice.

If the victim is to polarize the aggressive tendencies of the community and effect their transfer to himself, community must be maintained. There must be a "metonymic" relationship between members of the community and ritual victims. There must also be discontinuity. The victim must be neither too familiar to the community nor too foreign to it. . . . Ritual requires the sacrifice of a victim as similar as possible to the "monstrous double." The marginal categories from which these victims are generally drawn barely fulfill this requirement, but they provide the least unsatisfactory compromise.<sup>34</sup>

There is no suggestion that Clifford represents the extreme marginality of "slaves, children, livestock." But in the court that is the domain of this play, he is neither the king nor a contender for kingship. As noted earlier, Margaret is no less "monstrous" than Clifford, but she is much less marginal: "a woman's general." Since Shakespeare altered his source material in making her York's princi-

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<sup>32</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: ARK Paperbacks, 1966), 179.

<sup>33</sup> *Violence and the Sacred*. Trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1977), 254.

<sup>34</sup> Girard, 271-72.

pal tormentor, we can only guess his purpose by the effect of the change: it concentrates the contrast between her character and her husband's. Clifford is the only Lancastrian partisan to be so abused in death. (Prince Edward is dispatched quickly with one stab from each of the York brothers [V.v.38-40]; Henry is stabbed once to death and once after by the ultimate "monstrous double" who becomes Richard III.) Because Clifford is not of royal blood there is no taint of regicide in killing him or in teasing his corpse, but there is the requisite "release" of doing it to someone who represents the king and queen. In the address to the corpse quoted above, Clifford is held equally responsible for York's and Rutland's deaths.

As Girard concludes his section on "Sacrificial Substitution":

Sacrificial preparations involve many actions that may seem contradictory, but all are perfectly adapted to their goals. With persistent foresight the religious mind pursues its ends and without realizing it fulfills all the conditions for catharsis. Its only interest is to imitate the generative violence as faithfully as possible. It strives to procure, and if need be to invent, a sacrificial victim as similar as possible to its ambiguous vision of the original victim. The model it imitates is not the true model, but a model transfigured by the mechanism of the "monstrous double." This transfiguration, this primordial difference, directs all religious thought toward the victims that, thanks to their nature and sacrificial preparation, are neither divisive nor trivial victims, thus assuring for the ritual performance a cathartic value beneficial to the community that enacts it.<sup>35</sup>

Coming as it does at nearly the middle of the play, the verbal desecration of Clifford's body constitutes neither the cause nor the consequence of the crisis of kingship. Nor is it an adequate ritual, in the true sense of Girard's and Douglas's descriptions, to resolve that crisis, because Clifford is a partisan in the conflict, whereas an effective *pharmakos*, the sacrificial victim whose death or expulsion purifies the community, must be recognized as such by the full community. In fact, the ritual performance begun here will not be

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<sup>35</sup> Girard, 273.

completed until the end of *Richard III*. "When the survivors of *Henry VI* subsequently vent their accumulated violence on Richard, Shakespeare resacralizes the social construct that he had interrogated throughout *Henry VI*."<sup>36</sup> Thus the ritual action of 3 *Henry VI* is a travesty whose effect on the audience is a warning chill. There are more chilling effects in the play, all versions of ambiguity: notably Richard's long soliloquy about his prodigious deformity in III.ii; Henry's exchange with the two gamekeepers in III.i, and the entire to-and-fro status of kingship itself throughout the play. Henry's dialogue with the keepers is especially ringing in connection with the episode of Clifford's corpse, and comes in the scene immediately following that episode. The keepers arrest him, and Henry tries to persuade them to recognize his authority:

*K. Henry:* I was anointed king at nine months old;  
 My father and my grandfather were kings;  
 And you were sworn true subjects unto me.  
 And tell me then, have you not broke your oaths?  
*1st Keeper:* No, for we were subjects but while you were  
 king.  
*K. Henry:* Why, am I dead? Do I not breathe a man?  
 Ah, simple men, you know not what you swear!  
 .....  
 But do not break your oaths, for of that sin  
 My mild entreaty shall not make you guilty.  
 Go where you will, the King shall be commanded;  
 And be you kings, command, and I'll obey.  
 (III.i.76-93)

This exchange takes place at just about the spatial center of the play, and it crystallizes the whole crisis of ambiguous monarchy that

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<sup>36</sup> This is David Riggs's observation in comments written upon an earlier draft of this paper. His note concludes with this excellent insight: "But his view of that construct will never be the same. Now that he had learned how to produce ideology, he was able to imagine characters who use it, in accordance with Machiavelli's teaching, as an effective means of governance. Think for a moment about Shakespeare's most eloquent apologists for the organic state: the Archbishop of Canterbury, Ulysses, Menenius. These are not nostalgic patriots like the Earl of Exeter in *Henry VI*. They are professional ideologues and would be equally at home in Whitehall, Florence, or Washington, D.C."



the play puts forward. In much the same way that he had asked Margaret for permission to speak, the king asks lowly subjects to confirm not only his status as king but also his status as living or dead, offers to prevent their further sins, and finally submits to them altogether, declaring them kings. When the most essential distinctions (life and death, king and commoner) are erased, we have exactly the situation Mary Douglas describes, the dangerous ambiguity that threatens "the hierarchy of values . . . dramatically undermined by paradox and contradiction." The same need for distinction exists between ritual and play. Although they are often morphologically identical, that is, ritual can look like play and play can have all the formal rule and regulation of ritual, the two remain integrally distinct in matters of intention and temporality. In ritual matters, nothing less than the survival and continuity of culture is at stake, whereas in play, the activity is inscribed within a context of here-and-now. Play comes to an end, until the next time; ritual is intended to link the present formally with past and future, to stabilize the here-and-now in a temporal continuum. When a subject of ritual, such as kingship or the distinction between life and death, is treated as if it were the object of a game, the crucial difference is blurred into ambiguity and the cultural constructions that create the identity of the community are confounded. In shaping *3 Henry VI* as a game, Shakespeare located the York-Lancaster monarchic crisis precisely.

The contextualization of ritual in play and of ritual *as* play in *3 Henry VI* serves to demonstrate a kind of retrograde culture in danger of extinction. Setting aside the "providential" reading of Richard's scourging function, we are still left with a picture of cultural and political implosion, collapsing in on itself with all of its accustomed structures emptied of meaning. As Riggs expressed it, *3 Henry VI* moves to "wholesale aggressions on the very fabric of society. Emerging from an environment in which the *lex talionis* enjoins men to violate all moral and political obligations, the youngest son of York determines to disregard the very fraternal ties that hold together his own house [and decides] to act as 'myself alone' . . ."<sup>37</sup> In his closing speech, Richard tellingly denies all relationship. His self-definition—"I have no brother, I am like no brother; /

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<sup>37</sup> Riggs, 135.



... I am myself alone" (V.vi. 80, 83)—is the very antithesis of society, as Shakespeare was to show again in *Coriolanus*; it is even the antithesis of game, since play as game normally implies and requires the presence of others. Just as the objects and relationships in which civilizations invest their meaning and through which they express their own storied structures—crown, throne, monarchy, dynastic and family relations—are evacuated and collapsed in this play, so too is the play itself at the end: both Richard's last soliloquy and his Judas-kiss bestowed upon the young Prince (V.vii.33–34) betray as soon as it is spoken Edward's "hope" for "lasting joy" (46). We know before the play ends that Edward's reign is no more than the "mirthful comic shows" (43) he calls for, a kind of half-time interlude between the end of 3 *Henry VI* and II.ii.40 of *Richard III*. Monarchy itself disappears, like Lewis Carroll's Cheshire Cat, leaving only a grin. Henry's isolation on the molehill leads eventually to Richard's (literally uncivilized) "myself alone." Castles and thrones, and the monarchy they symbolize, are deconstructed out of history when a king sits on a molehill and refuses to play.

Charles R. Forker

Marlowe's *Edward II* and  
its Shakespearean Relatives:  
the Emergence of a Genre\*

I

It is a commonplace of scholarship that Marlowe's influence upon Shakespeare, particularly in the early years of the latter's career, was both profound and pervasive—perhaps even more so than that of Kyd (whose imprint can be discerned in *Titus Andronicus* and *Hamlet*) or of Lyly (to whom the early comedies obviously owe much). For years editors have pointed to Shakespeare's tribute to Marlowe (with its accompanying quotation from *Hero and Leander*) in *As You Like It* ("Dead shepherd, now I find thy saw of might, / 'Who ever lov'd that lov'd not at first sight?'" [III.v.81–82])<sup>1</sup> and to

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\* Much of the material in this essay has been subsequently absorbed into the critical introduction of my Revels edition of *Edward II* (Manchester University Press, 1994).

<sup>1</sup> *As You Like It* may contain another allusion to Marlowe: Touchstone remarks in response to Audrey's ignorance, "When a man's verses cannot be understood, nor a man's good wit seconded with the forward child, understanding, it strikes a man more dead than a great reckoning in a little room" (III.iii.10–13). Here Shakespeare seems to be echoing *The Jew of Malta* ("Infinite riches in a little room" [I.i.37]) in conjunction with the circumstances of Marlowe's death by stabbing at a lodging house in Deptford on 30 May 1593. Also Sir Hugh

Pistol's parody of Tamburlaine in 2 *Henry IV* ("Shall pack-horses / And hollow pamper'd jades of Asia, / Which cannot go but thirty mile a day, / Compare with Caesars, and with Cannibals . . . ?" [II.iv.162-65]).<sup>2</sup> We have long been aware, of course, of how much Shakespeare must have learned from his shorter-lived contemporary in plays such as *Richard III* (which takes over from *Tamburlaine* the strategy of a single dominant character)<sup>3</sup> and *The Merchant of Venice* (which in Shylock complicates and deepens a stereotype from *The Jew of Malta*)<sup>4</sup> and *Macbeth* (which dramatizes the psychology of damnation in ways that recall *Doctor Faustus*). It is accepted, also, that *Hero and Leander* must have set the fashion for erotic mythological narrative that Shakespeare took up in *Venus and Adonis*,<sup>5</sup> in

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Evans quotes, or rather misquotes, lines from Marlowe's popular lyric, "Come live with me and be my love," in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (III.i.16-28). The standard early study of the Marlowe-Shakespeare relationship is A. W. Verity's *The Influence of Christopher Marlowe on Shakespeare's Earlier Style* (Cambridge: Macmillan and Bowes, 1886; repr. Folcroft, Pa.: Folcroft Press, 1969). For a more political and ideologically oriented discussion of the artistic interchange, see James Shapiro, *Rival Playwrights: Marlowe, Jonson, Shakespeare* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1991), 75-132. See also Irving Ribner, *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare*, rev. ed. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1965). Citations from Shakespeare are taken from David Bevington, ed., *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman, 1980); those from Marlowe come from Irving Ribner, ed., *The Complete Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (New York: Odyssey Press, 1963).

<sup>2</sup> See 2 *Tamburlaine*, IV.iv.1-2.

<sup>3</sup> Of course the dominance of a single character over the dramatic action of a play is older than Marlowe (Preston's *Cambyzes* comes to mind), but *Tamburlaine* obviously lent the technique an irresistible glamour and assurance that must have made it seem fresh, even novel.

<sup>4</sup> M. C. Bradbrook comments on this relationship; see "Shakespeare's Recollections of Marlowe," in *Shakespeare's Styles: Essays in Honour of Kenneth Muir*, ed. Philip Edwards, Inga-Stina Ewbank, and G. K. Hunter (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1980), 192-93. Shakespeare also quotes a line from Marlowe's translation of Ovid's *Elegies* ("The moon sleeps with Endymion every day"; I.xiii.43) in *The Merchant of Venice*: "Peace, ho! The moons sleeps with Endymion" (V.i.109).

<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Brooke writes suggestively on "Marlowe as Provocative Agent in Shakespeare's Early Plays," *Shakespeare Survey* 14 (1961), 34-44; see also David Riggs, *Shakespeare's Heroical Histories: "Henry VI" and Its Literary Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1971). Bradbrook, however, believes that the "prime model of *Venus and Adonis* is not Marlowe, but [John] Clapham," whose Latin poem *Narcissus* was published in 1591; "the two Ovidian poems" by Marlowe and Shakespeare "seem rather to be running parallel to each other, both deriving from Clapham." See "Shakespeare's Recollections of Marlowe," 197-98.

addition to which Marlowe has frequently been suggested as the rival poet to whose "proud full sail of . . . great verse" Sonnet 86 alludes. What is less widely recognized, although we have become increasingly cognizant of it in recent times,<sup>6</sup> is the almost equally formative impress of Shakespeare upon Marlowe.

Peter Alexander opened the door to this last perception in his ground-breaking work on the first historical tetralogy (*Shakespeare's "Henry VI" and "Richard III"* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929]) in which he showed that *The First Part of the Contention betwixt the Two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster* (1594) and *The True Tragedy of Richard, Duke of York* (1595) are bad quartos and, in the main, pirated versions of 2 and 3 *Henry VI*.<sup>7</sup> Alexander's work in conjunction with that of Charlton and Waller (who first proposed that *Edward II* borrowed from Shakespeare's earliest histories) and of A. P. Rossiter (who argued that Marlowe's tragedy levied upon *Woodstock*, which in turn had echoed 2 *Henry VI*)<sup>8</sup> allowed us to date Shakespeare's originals about 1590–91—earlier, that is, than Marlowe's *Edward II*, which had previously been assumed by most scholars to mark the beginning of the chronicle history as a dignified, coherent dramatic genre. It follows then, as F. P. Wilson pointed out, that except for morality interludes such as Skelton's *Magnyfycence* (1519) and Bale's *Kynge Johan* (originally composed before 1536,

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<sup>6</sup> See especially F. P. Wilson, *Marlowe and the Early Shakespeare* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), 104–31, and Harold F. Brooks, "Marlowe and Early Shakespeare," in Brian Morris, ed., *Mermaid Critical Commentaries: Christopher Marlowe* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1969), 65–94.

<sup>7</sup> Madeleine Doran, independently of Alexander, also argued for the reported nature of *The Contention* and *The True Tragedy* in *Henry VI Parts II and III: Their Relation to the Contention and the True Tragedy* (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Studies, 1928). For a more recent discussion of the textual complexities of *The Contention* and *The True Tragedy*, see the sections on these plays by William L. Montgomery in Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, eds., *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 175–208. Montgomery accepts the "bad quarto" theory of these texts. Montgomery and Taylor discuss, but disagree with, the unpublished work of Steven Urkowitz, who has argued that *The True Tragedy* embodies an earlier conception of King Henry's character than that found in the Folio text (3 *Henry VI*). See also Urkowitz's "Good News about 'Bad' Quartos," in Maurice Charney, ed., *"Bad" Shakespeare: Revaluations of the Shakespeare Canon* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1988), 197–99.

<sup>8</sup> See note 14 below.



revised in 1538, and rewritten in 1561) the crude, anonymous *Famous Victories of Henry V* (1586?) with its manifest debt to the traditions of the jest-book is the only historical drama in English that can reliably be established as earlier than Shakespeare's trilogy.<sup>9</sup> Wilson also endorsed the argument for the priority of 2 and 3 *Henry VI* to Marlowe's play by underlining Rossiter's convincing point that "the two passages in Part II and the one in Part III which resemble passages in *Edward II* were . . . suggested to Shakespeare by the chronicles for the reigns of Henry VI and Edward IV, whereas there are no corresponding passages in the chronicles of Edward II's reign which might have suggested these passages to Marlowe."<sup>10</sup> Harold Brooks argues in similar fashion that Marlowe's characterization of Mortimer, unhistorically styled Protector, is partly based upon incidents and behavior that have no counterparts in the chronicles but that must derive from the Protectors of 2 and 3 *Henry VI* (Duke Humphrey and York) and of *Richard III* (Richard of Gloucester).<sup>11</sup> Although the exact chronology of Marlowe's plays and of Shakespeare's early works remains a vexed and complicated problem depending on incomplete knowledge of the acting companies involved, the shaky evidence of parallel passages, speculative inferences about stylistic habits, and a miscellany of baffling variables,<sup>12</sup> a certain scholarly consensus may be said to have emerged.

Most informed opinion now holds that Marlowe's popular *Tamburlaine* and *The Jew of Malta* stimulated Shakespeare's dramatic and prosodic imagination in the late 1580s when these plays were first staged, and that the four dramas of the Henry VI-Richard III sequence, plays that display unquestionable features of Marlovian style and characterization, followed in rapid succession during 1590-

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas Legge's academic Latin tragedy, *Richardus Tertius* (1579-80), must also be included among the earliest history plays. Most scholars are agreed, however, that its influence on Shakespeare, if any, was indirect.

<sup>10</sup> Wilson, *Marlowe and the Early Shakespeare*, 105. Wilson is paraphrasing Rossiter (see note 14 below).

<sup>11</sup> Brooks, "Marlowe and Early Shakespeare," 72.

<sup>12</sup> See Kenneth Muir, "The Chronology of Marlowe's Plays," *Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society* 5 (1938-43), 345-56.



91.<sup>13</sup> *Edward II*, probably written in 1591–92, then took up the Shakespearean fashion of adapting materials from Holinshed and other historical sources to the stage, echoing the first tetralogy in the process and abetted also by dramas such as Peele's *Edward I* (1591), which Marlowe's play likewise echoes, and anonymous pieces such as *Jack Straw* (1590–91), *The Troublesome Reign of King John* (1590–91), and *Woodstock* (1591–93), the last two of which probably antedate but may postdate Marlowe's tragedy.<sup>14</sup> *The Contention* and *The True Tragedy*, presumably assembled hastily from memory by actors for performance in the provinces, clearly came after *Edward II* and incorporated (unconsciously?) a few verbal scraps from Marlowe that were probably absent from 2 and 3 *Henry VI* in their original form.

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<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, Clifford Leech, "The Dramatists' Independence," *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 10 (1967), 18–19. Antony Hammond cogently summarizes the arguments for an early dating (1591) of *Richard III*; see his New Arden edition (London: Methuen, 1981), 54–61. Taylor and Wells, however, finding the alleged indebtedness of *Edward II* to *Richard III* "unconvincing," date Shakespeare's play 1592–93; see *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion*, 116. The later date coincides with that assigned the play by E. K. Chambers in *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), 1:270. John Velz, although he accepts Chambers's traditional dating of *Richard III*, mentions the possibility that Clarence's dream of drowning (*Richard III*, I.iv.9–63) may lie behind Mistress More's similar dream in *Sir Thomas More* (1592–93?), in which case *Richard III* would obviously be the earlier of the two plays; see Velz, "Sir Thomas More and the Shakespeare Canon: Two Approaches," in T. H. Howard-Hill, ed., *Shakespeare and "Sir Thomas More": Essays on the Play and Its Shakespearean Interest* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989), 182.

<sup>14</sup> For the likely priority of *Edward I* to Marlowe's play, see H. B. Charlton and R. D. Waller, eds., *Edward II*, rev. F. N. Lees (London: Methuen, 1955), 8–10. Wolfgang Keller believed that *Woodstock* depended on Marlowe (see "Richard II, Erster Teil, Ein Drama aus Shakespeares Zeit," *Shakespeare-Jahrbuch* 35 [1899], 1–12), but A. P. Rossiter argues more cogently for the reverse order of composition in his standard edition of *Woodstock* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1946), 53–71; see also Lees's comments on Rossiter's position (Charlton and Waller, 219). Rupert Taylor lists numerous verbal parallels, some of them quite doubtful, between *The Troublesome Reign* and *Edward II* (see "A Tentative Chronology of Marlowe's and Some Other Elizabethan Plays," *PMLA* 51 [1936], 643–88), concluding that "the anonymous author was the borrower" (648); but since *The Troublesome Reign* was printed in 1591, Marlowe's play (if it was a source) together with *The Massacre at Paris* (which also contains verbal links to the anonymous play) would have to be pushed back to unacceptably early dates. Indeed it seems more likely that Marlowe lifted phrases and other details from *The Troublesome Reign*, which probably preceded *Edward II*; Lees notes that Taylor "offers no reasons" for his assertion, "which runs counter to all received opinion" (Charlton and Waller, 220).

Marlowe's play, after all, had been acted by Pembroke's Men, the same company with which the two mutilated texts of the *Henry VI* plays are associated. Then Shakespeare's *Richard II* (1594-95), a second tragedy about the deposition of a weak king dominated by flatterers, obviously imitated the analogous Marlowe play not only in its choice of subject but also in its structural design, nevertheless emerging as a drama wholly different in tone and emotional effect from its predecessor. Despite other similarities, Shakespeare in *Richard II* seems to have depended comparatively little on Marlowe's chronicle play for verbal or imagistic details, but there are demonstrable verbal links between *Edward II* and the plays of the first tetralogy as well as between Marlowe's tragedy and Kyd's(?) *Soliman and Perseda* (1592?), Lodge's *Wounds of Civil War* (1588?), Nashe's *Summer's Last Will and Testament* (1592-93), and the anonymous *Arden of Feversham* (1592).<sup>15</sup> In addition to *Richard II*, *Romeo and Juliet* contains a clear reminiscence of *Edward II* in Juliet's lines, "Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds, / Towards Phoebus' lodging!" (III.ii.1-2), an echo, apparently, of Edward's anticipation of meeting enemy forces: "Gallop apace, bright Phoebus, through the sky . . ." (IV.iii.43). And Hamlet's famous reference to death as "The undiscover'd country from whose bourn / No traveler returns" (*Hamlet*, III.i.80-81) may have taken its inception from Mortimer's parting words as he is led off to execution, "as a traveler / Go[ing] to discover countries yet unknown" (*Edward II*, V.vi.65-66).

Marlowe's chronicle history may thus be claimed to occupy a pivotal position in the putative sequence outlined above—a centrality that becomes even more obvious when we note the close verbal connections (borrowings, imitations, imperfect recollections, possible interpolations, and the like) that have been shown to exist between *Edward II* and the first Shakespearean tetralogy (in both the Folio and corrupt texts) as well as between it and other histories such as *Edward I*, *Woodstock*, and *The Troublesome Reign*. It may be more

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<sup>15</sup> See Tucker Brooke, "The Marlowe Canon," *PMLA* 27 (1922), 375-77; also Brooke, "The Authorship of the Second and Third Parts of *King Henry VI*," *Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences* 17 (1912), 160-77; Taylor, "A Tentative Chronology"; Charlton and Waller, eds., *Edward II*, 17-27; Frederick S. Boas, *Christopher Marlowe: A Biographical and Critical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), 192-201.

than fortuitous, for instance, that the descriptive title, *The Troublesome Raigne of John King of England, with the discoverie of King Richard Cordelions Base Sonne (vulgarly named, The Bastard Fawconbridge): also the death of King John at Swinstead Abbey*, is suspiciously similar in form and phrasing to that of the first edition of Marlowe's play: *The troublesome raigne and lamentable death of Edward the second, King of England: with the tragicall fall of proud Mortimer*. If Marlowe's tragedy was the receiver of artistic stimuli from Shakespeare as well as a stimulus upon him, we have a fascinating case of theatrical and stylistic interchange between the two dramatists that suggests something approaching symbiosis. That Marlowe's play is so obviously distinct from its Shakespearean predecessors and successors tells us something, perhaps, about the anxiety of influence or even the growing confidence on both sides of the relationship. But the points of contact are worth considering in greater detail than has generally been attempted. This, though in necessarily tentative and provisional outline, is the purpose of the following discussion. As a starting point I shall invoke a few of the more illustrative verbal and situational parallels, but I hope that these in turn will direct our attention to larger matters of characterization, form, theme, and overall concept. In the end, perhaps, we may gain a clearer idea of how, between them, Shakespeare and Marlowe established, and then experimented with, the chronicle history as an exciting new genre on the English stage.

## II

Going back to the first phase of these alternating pressures, we may inquire what Shakespeare learned from Marlowe in composing the early tetralogy. Certainly there is the appeal of the "mighty line" with its impressive freight of cosmic imagery and "high astounding terms" (*1 Tamburlaine*, Prologue, 5)—an influence readily apparent in the opening lines of *1 Henry VI*:

Hung be the heavens with black, yield day to night!  
Comets, importing change of times and states,  
Brandish your crystal tresses in the sky  
And with them scourge the bad revolting stars



That have consented unto Henry's death—...

(I.i.1-5)

The theatre that served Marlowe as the "tragic glass" in which to reflect the career of aspiring Tamburlaine could serve Shakespeare equally well for ambitious overreachers such as the Duke of York and his son, Richard III, to say nothing of heroic soldiers like Talbot. But Tamburlaine's obsession with the mystique of crowns and his lyrical exaltation over the symbolism of royal power was clearly transmissible as well. The feeling of "bloody and insatiate Tamburlaine," who deprives Cosroe of his throne out of the sheer "thirst of reign and sweetness of a crown" (*1 Tamburlaine*, II.vii.11-12), is recognizable in young Richard of Gloucester's speech, "How sweet a thing it is to wear a crown, / Within whose circuit is Elysium / And all that poets feign of bliss and joy" (*3 Henry VI*, I.ii.29-31). Later Richard embroiders the same sentiment:

I'll make my heaven to dream upon the crown,  
And, whiles I live, t' account this world but hell,  
Until my mis-shap'd trunk that bears this head  
Be round impaled with a glorious crown.

(*3 Henry VI*, III.ii.168-71)

As his catching up of the words "bliss" and "sweet" in the first example would indicate, Shakespeare must surely have recalled in these passages Tamburlaine's similar restlessness, his upward thrust for "That perfect bliss and sole felicity, / The sweet fruition of an earthly crown" (*1 Tamburlaine*, II.vii.28-29).

Yet how unlike Tamburlaine, "Of stature tall, and straightly fashioned" (*1 Tamburlaine*, II.i.7), is crookback Dick. Some of the dauntless self-confidence remains, but in conceiving Richard III, Shakespeare has wedded the *virtù* of the Scythian shepherd to the Machiavellian diabolism of such figures as Barabas and perhaps also (if *Titus Andronicus* is an earlier play) of his own Aaron, the Moor. Gloucester's gleeful fantasy of wickedness also has a Marlovian ring:

Why, I can smile, and murder whiles I smile,  
And cry "Content" to that which grieves my heart,  
And wet my cheeks with artificial tears,  
And frame my face to all occasions.

.....  
 I can add colors to the chameleon,  
 Change shapes with Proteus for advantages,  
 And set the murderous Machiavel to school.  
 Can I do this, and cannot get a crown?

(3 *Henry VI*, III.ii.182-94)

Indeed, as more than one critic has noticed, this soliloquy may hark back to the figure of Machiavel, who had introduced Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*:

I count religion but a childish toy  
 And hold there is no sin but ignorance.  
 Birds of the air will tell of murders past;  
 I am ashamed to hear such fooleries.  
 Many will talk of title to a crown;  
 What right had Caesar to the empery?  
 Might first made kings, and laws were then most sure  
 When, like the Draco's, they were writ in blood.

(Prologue, 14-21)

And the contemptuous attitude of Shakespeare's royal anti-Christ is also of a piece with Barabas's advice to Ithamore:

First, be thou void of these affections:  
 Compassion, love, vain hope, and heartless fear.  
 Be moved at nothing. See thou pity none,  
 But to thyself smile when the Christians moan.

(*The Jew of Malta*, II.iii.166-69)

As he plans the murder of the princes, for example, Richard III announces flatly, "Tear-falling pity dwells not in this eye" (*Richard III*, IV.ii.65).

As Brooke has pointed out, Queen Margaret's warning to Buckingham about his treacherous master ("take heed of yonder dog. / Look when he fawns, he bites ..." [*Richard III*, I.iii.288-89]) appropriates Barabas's boast, "We Jews can fawn like spaniels when we please, / And when we grin, we bite ..." (*The Jew of Malta*, II.iii.20-21). Given Shakespeare's obvious indebtedness to *The Jew* in 3 *Henry VI* and *Richard III*, it may not be too fanciful to lay a bit of the phantasmagoric imagery of Clarence's dream to Marlovian



inspiration. Barabas's delight in "heap[ing] pearl like pebble-stones," in "Bags of fiery opals, sapphires, amethysts, / Jacinths, hard topaz, grass-green emeralds, / Beauteous rubies, sparkling diamonds, / And seld-seen costly stones of so great price" (*The Jew of Malta*, I.i.23-28), seems to reappear, much more eerily, in the doomed duke's vision of sunken treasure:

Wedges of gold, great anchors, heaps of pearl,  
 Inestimable stones, unvalued jewels,  
 All scatt'ed in the bottom of the sea.  
 Some lay in dead men's skulls; and, in the holes  
 Where eyes did once inhabit, there were crept,  
 As 'twere in scorn of eyes, reflecting gems,  
 That woo'd the slimy bottom of the deep....

(*Richard III*, I.iv.26-32)<sup>16</sup>

Interestingly in this comparison, the sheer pleasure of wealth in its tactile and visual aspects captures Marlowe's poetic imagination, whereas Shakespeare, while still invoking a sense of material beauty, transforms the imagery symbolically—almost emblematically—to associate it with death and thus to give it a moral and metaphysical significance absent from Marlowe's context.

Finally Shakespeare probably absorbed from Marlowe the idea of "the scourge of God," repeatedly stressed in *Tamburlaine* (especially in Part II), although the concept was familiar and already available to the dramatist in several of his historical sources. Pucelle in *1 Henry VI* announces that she is "Assign'd . . . to be the English scourge" (I.ii.129), and in the same play Talbot is called "the scourge of France" (II.iii.15) and her "bloody scourge" (IV.ii.16). In *2 Henry VI* York refers to Margaret as "England's bloody scourge" (V.i.118), and, as Hammond observes, the notion fundamentally informs the characterization of the tyrant in *Richard III*, who is conceived as "hell's black intelligencer" (IV.iv.71), an agent for sending lesser sinners such as Clarence, Hastings, Rivers, Vaughan, and Grey to their deserved ends, but whose own destruction at the hands of

<sup>16</sup> F. P. Wilson contrasts these passages in *Marlowe and the Early Shakespeare*, 122-23.

Richmond, God's "captain" (V.iii.108), takes place under divine sanction.<sup>17</sup>

Although it is dangerous to generalize about the effect of such Marlovian touches upon Shakespeare's early histories, one tendency does appear to stand out—namely that the borrowing, whether conscious or not, goes well beyond the merely incidental and phrasal. And the fresh contexts into which Shakespeare assimilates Marlovian ideas and images seem always to be significantly different from Marlowe's. The Henry VI-Richard III tetralogy was planned on an altogether more comprehensive scale and rests on a more coherent moral and humanistic base than the Marlowe plays that preceded it. There is a curious absence of metaphysical design in both *Tamburlaine* and *The Jew of Malta*, as though Marlowe were excited by the sheer grandeur and strength of the one protagonist and by the evil energy of the other, by their emotional appeal as astonishing natural forces. Neither the psychology of the characters nor their function in a morally intelligible universe is of primary importance. In contrast Shakespeare presents Richard III—a compound, in some sense, of elements from both Tamburlaine and Barabas—as a tyrant-Machiavel whose rise and fall dramatizes the final phase of a national myth (shaped by Hall's chronicle) with political, social, and religious implications that radiate beyond its own center. And despite its color and brilliancy, Marlowe's imagery seems harder, more metallic, less given to particularity, and less revelatory of character than does Shakespeare's. The first tetralogy already organizes political conflicts and personality clashes with a grasp of human complexity far in advance of the dramaturgical powers of the early Marlowe.

### III

That Marlowe in *Edward II* was indebted to Shakespeare's first

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<sup>17</sup> Hammond, ed., *Richard III*, 103. Interestingly, the motif reappears in *Edward II*, in which Mortimer Junior refers to the king as "England's scourge" (III.iii.74); the phrasing here, similar to that employed by Shakespeare to characterize Queen Margaret, might indicate another of Marlowe's several imitations of 2 *Henry VI* (see Charlton and Waller, 10-17).

histories is now generally taken as proved. Charlton and Waller in their edition of the tragedy list at least eight indubitable parallels of language or idea, together with others that, although more tenuous, are also strongly suggestive of Shakespearean origin. Thus, for instance, Marlowe borrows Queen Margaret's charge about the Duchess of Gloucester's extravagance ("She bears a duke's revenues on her back" [2 *Henry VI*, I.iii.80]) for Mortimer's hostility to Gaveston: "He wears a lord's revenue on his back" (*Edward II*, I.iv.406). Similarly Margaret, scoffing at her husband's weakness in military affairs, announces that "Stern Falconbridge commands the narrow seas" (3 *Henry VI*, I.i.239), a line that Marlowe (with a change of subject) reassigns to Mortimer, who in like manner is rebuking the passiveness of Edward: "The haughty Dane commands the narrow seas" (II.ii.166). In both 3 *Henry VI* (V.ii.11-12) and *Richard III* (I.iii.263) cedar trees and eagles are linked as twin symbols of hierarchical priority. Marlowe picks up the Shakespearean association and applies it to the emblem on Mortimer's shield, an emblem intended, of course, to insult Gaveston as a social inferior: "A lofty cedar tree, fair flourishing, / On whose top-branches kingly eagles [i.e., the barons] perch ..." (*Edward II*, II.ii.16-17). In 1 *Henry VI* Duke Humphrey scoffs at Winchester's preference for a weak king, "an effeminate prince, / Whom, like a *schoolboy*, you may *overawe*" (I.i.35-36; emphasis added). A related image appears in the next play: when the enemies of Humphrey have succeeded in disempowering him as Protector and Henry claims regal authority in his own right, Margaret crows, "I see no reason why a king of years / Should be to be protected *like a child*" (2 *Henry VI*, II.iii.28-29; emphasis added). Marlowe catches up these ideas (with a suggestion of phrasing from both examples) in Baldock's flattery to King Edward at a moment of similar self-assertion, after the barons have captured Gaveston:

This haught resolve becomes your majesty,  
 Not to be tied to their affection,  
 As though your highness were a *schoolboy* still,  
 And must be *awed* and governed *like a child*.  
 (*Edward II*, III.ii.28-31; emphasis added)

As for the vulnerability of children in a world of savage political aggression, Marlowe again seems to take his cue from Shakespeare.

Isabella is anxious for the safety of her son, the future Edward III: "Ah, boy, this towardness makes thy mother fear / Thou art not marked to many days on earth" (*Edward II*, III.ii.79–80). This seems to have been suggested by Gloucester's mordant asides in the presence of the boy king, Edward V, in *Richard III*: "So wise so young, they say, do never live long," and "Short summers lightly have a forward spring" (III.i.79, 94). As Brooks warily reminds us, we are dealing here with proverbial ideas—part of the common linguistic currency of the period; but the two contexts are so strikingly alike, both foreshadowing the early death of royal children, that the link between them is most unlikely to have been fortuitous. A question arises as to the dramatic function of the Marlowe appropriation, since the prophecy about Edward III's early demise, unlike its counterpart in Shakespeare's play, turns out to be untrue. But of course it prepares us for the rapid maturation of the prince, and also for the ironic scene at the end of the play when the complicity of the queen in Edward II's murder is made public and she, not her son, is the one in need of protection.<sup>18</sup> In *Edward II* Prince Edward defends Kent, his uncle, against Mortimer, who is eager to separate the boy from a "false" influence (V.ii.104) sympathetic to the persecuted king. This tension between the innocence of a child and Machiavelian realpolitik could also have come from *Richard III*, in which another Prince Edward defends his uncle and cousin against Gloucester's claim that they were "false friends" (III.i.15–16); like Lord Rivers (the uncle in *Richard III*), Marlowe's Kent is also beheaded.

Shakespeare obviously made much of the *de casibus* motif and its traditional association with Fortune's wheel. When Edward IV is forcibly dispossessed of the crown by Warwick in 3 *Henry VI*, he

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<sup>18</sup> See Brooks, "Marlowe and Early Shakespeare," 75–76. Another of Richard III's wry witticisms could have influenced Marlowe. Just before his execution Gaveston asks Warwick, "Treacherous earl, shall I not see the king?" and is answered, "*The king of heaven* perhaps, no other king" (*Edward II*, III.i.15–16; emphasis added). This is a little like Richard's cheeky defense of having killed Henry VI: to Lady Anne's statement, "O, he was gentle, mild, and virtuous!" Richard ripostes, "The better for *the King of Heaven* that hath him" (*Richard III*, I.ii.104–5; emphasis added). The repeated phrase, however, does not appear to have originated with Shakespeare; it occurs also, for instance, in the anonymous *King Leir* (c. 1590), line 1604 (see the edition by Geoffrey Bullough in *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957–75], 7:376).



manages a conventional expression of stoic defiance just before he is led offstage under guard: "Though fortune's malice overthrow my state, / My mind exceeds the compass of her wheel" (IV.iii.46-47). The downward revolution of the wheel turns out in this instance to be temporary, for Edward regains the crown later in the play; but the hubris of his boast implies that his earthly days are already numbered. Again Marlowe appears to imitate Shakespeare when he makes Mortimer utter a similar line as he too is being led captive from the stage: "Mortimer's hope surmounts his fortune far" (*Edward II*, III.iii.75). Once more the defeat is temporary and again it carries within it the seeds of greater disaster for the speaker, a point that Marlowe reinforces in Mortimer's exit speech before execution:

Base Fortune, now I see that in thy wheel  
There is a point, to which when men aspire,  
They tumble headlong down. That point I touched,  
And, seeing there was no place to mount up higher,  
Why should I grieve at my declining fall?

(V.vi.59-63)

Such moralizing carries all the more force since only a few scenes earlier, when he was arranging to exacerbate King Edward's misery, the same speaker had boasted, "Mortimer . . . now makes Fortune's wheel turn as he please[s]" (V.ii.52-53).

Marlowe of course would have had no need to consult Shakespeare for the commonplace of Fortune's wheel, available to him in *A Mirror for Magistrates* and a hundred other places; indeed he had used the concept effectively himself in *Tamburlaine*.<sup>19</sup> But the first tetralogy (especially in its final two plays, of which Marlowe clearly made use in other ways) embodies the tradition more dramatically than other likely sources, and here he could have appreciated its structural and theatrical possibilities more prominently utilized than elsewhere. Two separate speeches in *Edward II* that echo the scene of Henry VI's murder would seem to confirm this influence. In Shakespeare's play Richard of Gloucester, having just stabbed the defenseless king, sarcastically juxtaposes the high ambitions of the House of

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<sup>19</sup> Compare 1 *Tamburlaine*: "I hold the Fates bound fast in iron chains, / And with my hand turn Fortune's wheel about . . ." (I.ii.173-74).



Lancaster with its ignominious fall: "What, will the *aspiring* blood of Lancaster / Sink in the ground? I thought it would have *mounted*" (3 Henry VI, V.vi.61-62; emphasis added). Marlowe must have remembered part of this utterance in composing Edward II's threat to one of his refractory barons: "Frown'st thou thereat, *aspiring* Lancaster? / The sword shall plane the furrows of thy brows . . ." (Edward II, I.i.93-94; emphasis added); another fragment of the Shakespearean speech surfaces later in Marlowe's play when the captured king, ironically foreshadowing his own death, compares himself to a lion who, "highly scorning that the lowly earth / Should drink his blood, *mounts* up into the air" (V.i.13-14; emphasis added). In both plays we have the same combination—blood sinking into the ground associated with mounting up and with violence upon the person of a king.

Shakespeare's histories seem also to have suggested a few vivid strokes of characterization to Marlowe. The most remarkable of these, as Brooks has shown,<sup>20</sup> is Mortimer's feigned reluctance to accept the office of Lord Protector while along the way, in good Machiavellian fashion, he arranges to have power foisted upon him:

They thrust upon me the protectorship  
And sue to me for that that I desire.  
While at the council-table, grave enough,  
And not unlike a bashful Puritan,  
First I complain of imbecility [i.e., weakness],  
Saying it is *onus quam gravissimum*;  
Till, being interrupted by my friends,  
*Suscepi* that *provinciam* as they term it;  
And to conclude, I am Protector now.

(Edward II, V.iv.56-64)

The Mortimer presented to us in this speech (there is no precedent for these traits in the chronicles) is strikingly like the comically sanctimonious Gloucester who, assisted by Catesby and Buckingham, manipulates a pre-assembled group of Londoners into pressing the crown upon him. Richard appears "*aloft, between two Bishops*"—as "a holy man," prayer book in hand, acting out an exaggerated display of "devotion and right Christian zeal" (Richard III, III.vii.94-103).

<sup>20</sup> Brooks, "Marlowe and Early Shakespeare," 73-74.

Hypocritically urging his "poverty of spirit" and his "many ... defects" (III.vii.159-60), protesting his "unfit[ness] for state and majesty" (III.vii.205) and alleging that the acceptance of such a weight is "against my conscience and my soul" (III.vii.226), Richard, "play[ing] the maid's part" (III.vii.51), enacts precisely the "bashful Puritan" to whom Mortimer cynically likens himself.<sup>21</sup> How better to diabolize Mortimer at the end of *Edward II* than to make him describe himself for the nonce as though he were a pupil of Shakespeare's arch-hypocrite?

Marlowe adds a searing touch of pathos to Edward's tattered degradation in his sewer-prison—as well as a piercing irony—by having the exhausted and terrified king recall his wooing days. With a hint of self-mockery he says to Lightborn, "Tell Isabel, the queen, I looked not thus, / When for her sake I ran at tilt in France / And there unhorsed the Duke of Cleremont" (*Edward II*, V.v.67-69). Given Edward's rejection of his wife in favor of male favorites and his characteristic lack of chivalry elsewhere, this reminiscence of a heterosexual courtship comes somewhat unexpectedly; but it has the effect of engaging our sympathies more deeply than ever by reminding us not only of a lost gaiety and splendor but also of the queen's vindictive complicity in her husband's present wretchedness. Again, nothing in Holinshed could suggest such a detail, and it undoubtedly comes from a scene in *2 Henry VI* in which an equally unfeeling French queen (Margaret of Anjou) recalls her own proxy wooing by Suffolk, the man who has now become her adulterous lover. Margaret feels only contempt for her monkish spouse and, soon after her

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<sup>21</sup> Another of Marlowe's possible borrowings from this scene occurs in *Edward II* when the king, under house arrest at Killingworth, resists the entreaty of Sir William Trussel and the Bishop of Winchester to "resign" his crown. At first he refuses, at which point the two commissioners from London are about to leave the stage. Then at the urging of Leicester ("Call them again, my lord, and speak them fair, / For if they go, the prince shall lose his right"), Edward relents: "Call thou them back ..." (V.i.91-93). Although Marlowe's context is directly opposite to Shakespeare's (the wily acquisition of the crown rather than anguished surrender of it), the author of *Richard III* employs suspiciously similar staging as well as similar language:

*Catesby.* Call them again, sweet prince, accept their suit.

If you deny them, all the land will rue it.

*Gloucester.* Will you enforce me to a world of cares?

Call them again. I am not made of stones. . . . (III.vii.221-24)

arrival in England, voices her preference for the more glamorous figure who has sued for her hand in the king's name while promoting his own libidinous interest:

I tell thee, Pole, when in the city Tours  
Thou ran'st a-tilt in honor of my love  
And stol'st away the ladies' hearts of France,  
I thought King Henry had resembled thee  
In courage, courtship, and proportion;  
But all his mind is bent to holiness,  
To number Ave-Maries on his beads;  
His champions are the prophets and apostles,  
His weapons holy saws of sacred writ,  
His study is his tilt-yard, and his loves  
Are brazen images of canonized saints. (I.iii.50-60)

Although Shakespeare's context is quite different, scorn rather than pathos being the principal effect of Margaret's speech, we should notice that weak kings, victimized in each case by an unfaithful queen in league with a power-thirsty nobleman, make up the background situation in both plays.

Perhaps Marlowe remembered the ominous lines of Suffolk that conclude the first drama in Shakespeare's series ("Margaret shall now be Queen, and rule the King; / But I will rule both her, the King, and realm" [*1 Henry VI*, V.v.107-8]); for after Gaveston and the Spencers have been taken from him, Edward too is ruled by a flint-hearted queen (Isabella), who in turn has become the pawn of a political schemer (Mortimer). The latter's words in soliloquy ("The prince I rule, the queen do I command . . ." [V.iv.48]) clearly recall Suffolk's. Certainly the two queens have points of similarity: Marlowe's Isabella, for instance, coldly consents to the murder of her husband under Mortimer's domination, just as Shakespeare's Margaret, for equally political reasons and with Suffolk at her side, counsels the elimination of Duke Humphrey. Moreover the policy meeting in which Margaret, Suffolk, and their allies discuss the best means of liquidating Humphrey (*2 Henry VI*, III.i) could have prompted Marlowe's similar scene in which Isabella persuades Mortimer to agree to Gaveston's recall from banishment—the better to "greet his lordship with a poniard" (*Edward II*, I.iv.266). In this episode Mortimer speaks of a hypothetical situation that might

provide "some color" (I.iv.279), or justification, for rising in arms against the king; in the corresponding Shakespearean scene Winchester suggests that the conspirators against Duke Humphrey "want a color for his death" (III.i.236). Both queens, too, are warlike, being actively engaged in military campaigns.

Holinshed records that the Earl of Lancaster was so contemptuous of Edward II that he "greeuously and vndutifullie reproched him without respect had to his roiall estate."<sup>22</sup> Marlowe gives this detail dramatic vitality by having Lancaster and Mortimer Junior openly taunt the young monarch for his weakness, folly, and unkingly policies:

*Lancaster.* Look for rebellion: look to be deposed.

Thy garrisons are beaten out of France,  
And, lame and poor, lie groaning at the gates.  
The wild O'Neil, with swarms of Irish kerns,  
Lives uncontrolled within the English pale.  
Unto the walls of York the Scots made road  
And unresisted drave away rich spoils.

*Mortimer Junior.* The haughty Dane commands the  
narrow seas,

While in the harbor ride thy ships unrigged.

*Lancaster.* What foreign prince sends thee ambassadors?

*Mortimer Junior.* Who loves thee, but a sort of flatterers?

(*Edward II*, II.ii.159-69)

It is not unlikely, however, that in addition to Holinshed, Marlowe may have been stimulated by the similar scene of *3 Henry VI* in which Warwick browbeats Edward IV, whom he has just reduced to the rank of Duke of York in his anger at being betrayed in his recent embassy to arrange Edward's marriage to the Lady Bona:

Alas, how should you govern any kingdom,  
That know not how to use ambassadors,  
Nor how to be contented with one wife,  
Nor how to use your brothers brotherly,

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<sup>22</sup> Raphael Holinshed, *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, 6 vols. (London: Johnson, Rivington, et al., 1807-08), 2:564.



Nor how to study for the people's welfare,  
Nor how to shroud yourself from enemies?

.....

Henry now shall wear the English crown,  
And be true king indeed, thou but the shadow.

(IV.iii.35-40, 49-50)

The probability of influence here is perhaps all the greater in that the omitted part of the speech just quoted contains Edward's words, already cited above, on his mind's exceeding the compass of Fortune's wheel. And, as has also been noted earlier, Mortimer's line, "The haughty Dane commands the narrow seas," echoes Margaret's scornful words to King Henry ("Stern Falconbridge commands the narrow seas") from a similar context in the same play. Nor can one help noticing the image of Edward IV as the "shadow" king. Edward II's most elegiac lines, "But what are kings when regiment is gone, / But perfect shadows in a sunshine day?" (*Edward II*, V.i.26-27), movingly invert the traditional association of kingship with the sun in a way that might also have been prompted by this episode.<sup>23</sup>

Different as they are in other respects, we might hesitantly suggest a tenuous link between the conceptions of the two King Edwards addressed so disrespectfully in these quotations. Both monarchs are portrayed as sensualists, their judgment clouded by sexual attachments (the widow Grey and Mistress Shore in Shakespeare, Gaveston and Spencer Junior in Marlowe), and both too are characterized by stubbornness of will. Edward IV seems just as ready

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<sup>23</sup> Marlowe could also have recalled the extended wordplay on "shadow" and "substance" in *1 Henry VI*: the Countess of Auvergne uses "shadow" to refer to Talbot's portrait and "substance" to mean his physical body; Talbot then wittily inverts the terms to distinguish his individual person (his "shadow") from his army (his "substance"). See *1 Henry VI*, II.iii.36-62. In the same play the French king, Charles VII, is also referred to as the "shadow of himself" (V.iv.133) when he is forced to acknowledge Henry VI as his liegeland, thus becoming a mere "viceroy" under him. In *Richard III* Queen Margaret gloats over Elizabeth after Edward IV's death as "poor shadow, painted queen, / The presentation of but what I was . . ." (IV.iv.83-84). Antony Hammond suggests Gloucester's opening soliloquy in *Richard III* as a source: "I . . . Have no delight to pass away the time, / Unless to see my shadow in the sun . . ." (I.i.24-26); see Hammond, ed., *Richard III*, 57. Hammond (57-61) also discusses other possible links between *Richard III* and *Edward II*.



to imperil his crown by insisting on an upstart queen (Elizabeth) as Edward II is willing to risk his throne by refusing to give up Gaveston. Lancaster at one point compares Gaveston to Helen of Troy, "the Greekish strumpet," who has caused "many valiant knights" to risk their lives in "bloody wars" (II.v.15-16). The whole climate of sexual politics, in fact—an emphasis almost wholly absent from Marlowe's sources—was to be found repeatedly in the Shakespearean tetralogy. If Marlowe borrowed this concept from Shakespeare (for it pervades the entire series from Talbot's encounter with the Countess of Auvergne to Richard III's attempt to marry Elizabeth of York), he clearly gave it a uniquely macabre twist, for sexual domination (Gaveston's over Edward, Mortimer's over Isabella, Lightborn's over his royal victim) becomes a controlling metaphor in Marlowe's tragedy for the force of self-destruction. And the anal penetration with a fiery spit that constitutes the play's painful climax makes a far bleaker statement about the intersection of sex and politics than Shakespeare ever saw fit to dramatize.

Nonetheless, the very savagery of Edward's murder could have been linked in Marlowe's mind with the almost equally brutal scene of York's ritual killing in *3 Henry VI*. Here the victim is made to stand upon a molehill, mocked for his kingly pretensions, crowned with paper, and given a napkin wet with the blood of his slaughtered son. The entire episode, as has often been observed, is conceived to evoke overtones of the Crucifixion and probably owes something to the biblical cycle plays of the late Middle Ages that survived in some localities into the period of Shakespeare's boyhood.<sup>24</sup> A major point of Shakespeare's scene is the animalistic degradation of a royal figure. When Marlowe came to do something similar, to stage the degradation of Edward II, he turned to Stowe's *Annals* for a human interest and a pathos not available in either Holinshed's or Grafton's chronicles. It was here that he found the detail of Edward's being shaved in puddle water—a detail that underscores the theme of humiliation, for the shaving was apparently undertaken not merely to make the king unrecognizable but also to violate his royal dignity,

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<sup>24</sup> See Harold C. Gardiner, S. J., *Mysteries' End: An Investigation of the Last Days of the Medieval Religious Stage*, Yale Studies in English, Vol. 103 (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1946), 65-93.

his symbolic manhood, as signified by the beard.<sup>25</sup> Marlowe chose not to make use of Stowe's description of how King Edward was crowned with hay, scoffed at and mocked as a would-be king, and then "set on a moale hill" to be barbered;<sup>26</sup> but he could hardly have failed to associate the molehill scene in Stowe with its counterpart in Shakespeare's play, especially since he was already drawing upon the latter independently for suggestions of characterization and speech. It is therefore interesting to speculate whether York's memorable epithet for Margaret, a "tiger's heart wrapt in a woman's hide" (3 *Henry VI*, I.iv.137), might have conditioned Edward's images of his enemies—"Inhuman creatures, nursed with tiger's milk" in whose "embracements" one would find less "safety" than "in a tiger's jaws" (*Edward II*, V.i.71, 116-17). Another verbal link between the two suffering characters may show up in Edward's self-pitying gesture of sending a tear-drenched handkerchief to his queen: "If with the sight thereof she be not moved, / Return it back and *dip it in my blood*" (*Edward II*, V.i.119-20; emphasis added). Conceivably Marlowe recalled the lines of York in Shakespeare's play:

This cloth thou *dip'dst* in blood of my sweet boy,  
And I with tears do wash the blood away.  
Keep thou the napkin, and go boast of this;  
*[Gives back the bloodstained cloth.]*  
And if thou tell'st the heavy story right,  
Upon my soul, the hearers will shed tears.  
Yea even my foes will shed fast-falling tears

<sup>25</sup> Brooks suggests that Shakespeare may have recalled Marlowe's episode with the puddle water in *The Comedy of Errors*, where Dr. Pinch, like Edward II, also suffers a humiliating assault: a messenger reports that the doctor's "beard they have sing'd off with brands of fire; / And ever, as it blaz'd, they threw on him / Great pails of puddled mire to quench the hair" (V.i.171-73). See "Marlowe and Early Shakespeare," 78-79. For evidence that Shakespeare's comedy postdates *Edward II*, see R. A. Foakes, ed., *The Comedy of Errors* (London: Methuen, 1962), xix-xx. Chambers dates the play 1592-93 (*William Shakespeare*, 1:270); Wells and Taylor date it 1594 (*William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion*, 116). Violation of manly dignity by means of assaulting the beard comes out again in *King Lear*, in which Regan, before the blinding of Gloucester, "ignobly" "pluck[s]" the helpless duke "by the beard" (III.vii.36-37).

<sup>26</sup> John Stowe, *The Annales of England* (London: Ralfe Newbery, 1592), 343; Marlowe probably used the edition of 1580, in which the phrase is identical.

And say, "Alas, it was a piteous deed!"  
 (3 *Henry VI*, I.iv.157-63; emphasis added)

Shakespeare of course used the molehill violence in 3 *Henry VI* partly as a structural device, for it effectively sets up the contrast with the play's later molehill scene—that in which King Henry retreats from the Battle of Towton to contemplate the attractions of the pastoral life and during which the blind killing of fathers by sons and sons by fathers is emblemized with such schematic irony. The characterization of the king as a would-be contemplative more attached to a spiritual "crown . . . call'd content" (III.i.64) than to the "polish'd perturbation" (2 *Henry IV*, IV.v.22) pursued so relentlessly by figures like York, Edward IV, and Richard of Gloucester also makes a brief appearance in *Edward II*. Marlowe gives us no emblematic molehill—in Shakespeare the double-edged symbol of lowliness and futile ambition; but he does show us King Edward at Neath Abbey, disguised apparently as a monk,<sup>27</sup> laying his head in the abbot's lap in a childlike gesture of exquisite vulnerability. The same kind of escapist fantasy that characterizes Henry's reverie on the molehill actuates Edward in the monastery: "Father, this life contemplative is heaven. / O that I might this life in quiet lead" (IV.vi.20-21). And the purpose of the contemplative motif is the same in both plays also—to heighten the contrast between civilized calm, reason, and a settled order on the one hand and the chaos of civil butchery on the other. Indeed, it is hard not to think that "holy Harry of Lancaster," Shakespeare's least regal monarch, had set a precedent for the dramatization of unkingly weakness that Marlowe, whether consciously or not, was to exploit in the figure of Edward of Carnarvon. Naiveté and softness of inclination are stressed in both characters: Margaret, for example, sneers at a husband "Too full of childish pity" (2 *Henry VI*, III.i.225), and Clifford rebukes his "too much lenity" (3 *Henry VI*, II.ii.9), while Edward, with imperfect self-

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<sup>27</sup> The monkish disguise comes from Peele's *Edward I*, which Marlowe echoes verbally at this point (*Edward I*, xxiii, l. 2519; compare *Edward II*, IV.vi.96); but the disguise of Henry VI (3 *Henry VI*, III.i.12), who, like Edward II, is seeking futilely to elude capture and who carries a "prayer book," may well have contributed to Marlowe's episode in a secondary way.



understanding, asks, "Yet how have I transgressed, / Unless it be with too much clemency?" (V.i.122-23).

Shakespeare's early cycle even suggests parallels with Marlowe's play in the treatment of a subordinate character such as Kent, who, like Clarence, defects to the enemies of his royal brother and then, plagued by guilt, returns to family loyalty. Kent rebukes himself in soliloquy:

Vile wretch, and why hast thou, of all unkind,  
Borne arms *against thy brother and thy king?*  
(*Edward II*, IV.v.14-15; emphasis added)

These lines, particularly the second, seem to imitate a similar Shakespearean speech in which Clarence justifies his desertion of Warwick and his reversion to the support of Edward IV:

Why, trowest thou, Warwick,  
That Clarence is so harsh, so blunt, unnatural,  
To bend the fatal instruments of war  
*Against his brother and his lawful king?*  
(3 *Henry VI*, V.i.85-88; emphasis added)

Enough has been said, I trust, to suggest that Shakespeare's early histories must be regarded, at least in principle, as the progenitors of Marlowe's only attempt at an English chronicle play—a history, that is, not based on foreign subjects such as *Tamburlaine* or *The Massacre at Paris*. Marlowe was clearly experimenting with a genre that Shakespeare had already evolved, a genre that necessitated compressions of time; rearrangements, simplifications, and imaginative expansions of episodes; and additions to the crowded matter of Holinshed. In choosing to dramatize the reign of Edward II, Marlowe was continuing to deal with the same kind of politics that Shakespeare had confronted in the troubled reigns of Henry VI, Edward IV, and Richard III—with extremes of power and weakness, with treachery, aggression, carnage, and contested thrones, with child kings and their protectors (both good and evil), with sexual partners and self-serving advisors who dominate or corrupt those in authority, with the ignoring of wise counsel, and with destructive foreign policies in conjunction with the chaos of civil war at home. All this required a diffusion of interest and the use of multiple characters rather than



the concentration on a single commanding figure that had been typical of Marlowe's earlier dramas. The beheading of political enemies occurs with accelerating frequency in the work of both playwrights (York's head is ironically to "overlook the town of York" [3 *Henry VI*, I.iv.180] as Warwick's is similarly to "overlook" those of his fellow rebels [*Edward II*, III.iii.54]), and Shakespeare's series exposes us to a succession of murders of helpless royal victims, often in prison—Duke Humphrey, York, Henry VI, Clarence, Richard III's nephews—that might be thought to provide models for the atrocities of Lightborn.<sup>28</sup> Coronations, sometimes shown on-stage, succeed deaths or falls from power in the tetralogy, and Marlowe follows Shakespeare here as well. When Edward IV is proclaimed king, Montgomery throws down his gauntlet as the official champion (3 *Henry VI*, IV.vii.75); in similar fashion an unnamed champion ceremonially defends Edward III at his accession (*Edward II*, V.iv.75–79). Marlowe obviously had much to learn from his fellow dramatist's example. Douglas Cole has suggested, for instance, that the "closest analogue" to Edward's emotional suffering when the king must part from Gaveston at the time of his banishment occurs in 2 *Henry VI* when "the banished Suffolk bids a sorrowful farewell to the faithless Queen" (III.ii);<sup>29</sup> later in the same play, Queen Margaret weeps over the head of her decapitated paramour—

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<sup>28</sup> As Hammond points out (58–59), Marlowe may have picked up a hint or two in his portrayal of Lightborn from the scenes of *Richard III* in which the murderers of Clarence appear. In commissioning the villains, Richard warns them that "Clarence is well-spoken, and perhaps / May move your hearts to pity if you mark him," to which the First Murderer responds, "Tut, tut, my lord, we will not stand to prate . . ." (I.iii.347–349). A similar exchange occurs when Mortimer commissions Lightborn to murder Edward:

*Mortimer Junior.* But at his looks, Lightborn, thou wilt relent.

*Lightborn.* Relent! Ha, ha! I use much to relent. (V.iv.26–27)

Moreover Marlowe seems to echo here the scene of Shakespeare's play that immediately follows in which the murder itself occurs:

*Clarence.* Relent, and save your souls.

.....

*First Murderer.* Relent? No. 'Tis cowardly and womanish.

*Clarence.* Not to relent is beastly, savage, devilish. (I.iv.259–65)

<sup>29</sup> Cole, *Suffering and Evil in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1962), 165.

an action that could well have prompted Mortimer's cruel speech in which he imagines Edward "bestow[ing] / His tears" on the severed head of Gaveston (II.v.52-53).

What is perhaps more important than any of the hints, verbal or otherwise, that Marlowe may have taken from Shakespeare is the total difference of ethos and philosophic perspective that *Edward II* projects. One clue to this difference lies in the absence of any action in Marlowe's play that requires the use of the upper stage. The explanation here, of course, may lie simply in the physical arrangements of the particular theatre for which *Edward II* was written; but the apparently missing "above" (repeatedly used in the Shakespeare histories) implies an altered metaphysic—or perhaps a more profound skepticism about inherited religious categories than Shakespeare normally expresses. Shakespeare's placing of scenes occasionally seems to reflect a remnant of the old medieval-allegorical concept of stage space, as, for instance, when the Duchess of Gloucester and Hume, a priest, observe from their position "aloft" while the conjurer Bolingbroke and his confederates raise from the trap a "fiend," who then "Descend[s] to darkness" (2 *Henry VI*, I.iv.9, 40-41), or when the saintly King Henry VI, who is reading a book of devotions, meets his violent death ironically "*on the walls*"—on high, as it were—just after he moralizes bitterly on his murderer's true identity as a "good devil" (3 *Henry VI*, V.vi.1-4). Hall's providential concept of historical process—of the sins of the fathers being visited on the sons, for instance, of national transgressions to be expiated by future generations, of England as a place of gardens reflecting natural law as in Spenser and Hooker, of royalty as quintessentially mystical, gets scant or no emphasis in Marlowe. Despite the brutality from which Shakespeare refuses to shrink, Marlowe's universe continues to look morally darker and psychologically more tormented. It is a world in which consistency and predictability of attitude or behavior seem alien—as comes out in the radical changes and inexplicably sudden shifts that seem to govern the actions of Isabella, Mortimer, Kent, and even the protagonist himself. Finally Marlowe's focus is both narrower and more realistic than Shakespeare's. There is an element of petty spite and nastiness in Marlowe's drama that makes the hostilities of the Shakespearean tetralogy seem almost heroic by contrast. We have little sense of past or future reigns in

*Edward II*, nothing, that is, of the Shakespearean longer view of time; and Marlowe also limits us to a more constricted social spectrum. Nor do we get anything in *Edward II* like the emblematic moralism of the contrasting pairs of fathers and sons divided only by their allegiance to the warring factions of a single family (3 *Henry VI*), nor anything like the didactic murderers of Clarence, who stage a semi-allegorical debate between the visitings of conscience and determined thuggery (*Richard III*).

#### IV

If Marlowe felt the impress of Shakespeare in *Edward II*, this patently did not prevent his becoming a pressure (even after his death) in the opposite direction. Borrowings from Marlowe in the reported texts of 2 and 3 *Henry VI*, however, were almost certainly more accidental than deliberate. *The Contention*, as Alexander has shown,<sup>30</sup> provides a convincing example. Here the pirate (an actor who had played in both 2 *Henry VI* and *Edward II*?) seems to have recalled a passage from Marlowe's play and imbedded it by mistake in the Shakespearean scene he was attempting to reconstruct. Lancaster's catalogue of national calamities, flung accusingly at Edward II, includes the lines (quoted above in another context): "The wild O'Neil, with swarms of Irish kerns, / Lives uncontrolled within the English pale" (*Edward II*, II.ii.162-63). Nothing like this appears in the Folio text of 2 *Henry VI*, but *The Contention* does contain a bloated version of the speech: "The wilde Onele my Lords, is up in Armes, / With troupes of Irish Kernes that uncontrold, / Doth plant themselves within the English pale" (*Contention*, pp. 698-99).<sup>31</sup> It may be indicative that O'Neil is an unhistorical fiction in both contexts, although members of this family were active in Ireland during Edward II's reign and the name would be well-known to Elizabethan audiences. Perhaps Marlowe's tragedy contributed also

<sup>30</sup> Alexander, *Shakespeare's "Henry VI" and "Richard III,"* 93-94.

<sup>31</sup> Quotations from *The Contention* and *The True Tragedy* are taken from volume 2 of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. Herbert Farjeon, 4 vols. (London: Nonesuch Press, 1953) and designated in the text parenthetically by page number.



to the staging of the cobbled up play. In the good text of 2 *Henry VI* Duke Humphrey's murder occurs discreetly offstage whereas the reported text, perhaps bidding for greater sensationalism, actually shows it. The stage-direction in *The Contention* reads: "Then the Curtaines being drawne, Duke *Humphrey* is discovered in his bed, and two men lying on his brest and smothering him in his bed" (p. 700). Since bits of *Edward II* seem to have invaded this text in other places,<sup>32</sup> it is at least possible that the reconstructors, undoubtedly theatre men, were recording a visual effect based partly on the even more horrific overpowering of Marlowe's title character, where the victim is similarly held down on his bed. Could it be that Marlowe's scene had proved too gruesomely popular with audiences not to be emulated? Also *The Contention*, unlike the Folio text of 2 *Henry VI*, makes it obvious that King Henry publicly seats his newly arrived wife beside him on the throne ("Lovely Queene *Margaret* sit down by my side" [p. 668]), even though he has had to give away Anjou and Maine as the unpopular price of the alliance. Again the staging here could have been prompted by the scene of Marlowe's tragedy in which Edward similarly seats his recently returned favorite by his side: "What? Are you moved that Gaveston sits here?" (*Edward II*, I.iv.8). In both cases the sharing of the throne with a foreigner symbolizes ominous weakness and dependency.

It is hardly necessary to dwell at length on the obvious debt that Shakespeare owed to *Edward II* in the most lyrical of his histories—*Richard II*. Lamb wrote long ago that "The reluctant pangs of abdicating Royalty in *Edward* furnished hints which Shakespeare scarce improved in his *Richard the Second*,"<sup>33</sup> and everyone has noticed that the two plays are similarly structured, audiences being alienated by the willful irresponsibility of the title figure in the early scenes and then gradually drawn into sympathy with him as he loses

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<sup>32</sup> Charlton and Waller list several verbal parallels between *The Contention* and *Edward II* (10–17). I add two others that they either underemphasize (1) or overlook (2):

(1) Even to my death, for I have lived too long. (*Contention*, 689)  
 Nay, to my death, for too long have I lived . . . . (*Edward II*, V.vi.83)

(2) Then is he gone, is noble Gloster gone . . . . (*Contention*, 694)  
 O, is he gone? Is noble Edward gone . . . . (*Edward II*, IV.vi.99)

<sup>33</sup> Charles Lamb, *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets*, in E. V. Lucas, ed., *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, 7 vols. (London: Methuen, 1903–5), 4:24.



first his crown and then his life. The minions of the king are executed in both plays, and both end with funeral rites in which the hearse or coffin of the slain monarch is borne in procession. Other parallels are obvious enough. Shakespeare, very nearly at least, seems to take over Marlowe's exclusion of comedy<sup>34</sup> as well as the emphasis on sorrowful parting—although, unlike Marlowe, he uses this latter to underscore the king's devotion to his queen rather than to favorites such as Gaveston and Spencer. Shakespeare makes much of the paradox of a monarch who is theoretically absolute, yet constrained by lesser mortals—a king who “must”: “What must the King do now? Must he submit? . . . Must he be depos'd? / The King shall be contented” (*Richard II*, III.iii.143–145). Suggestions for such frustration may have come from Marlowe's Edward, who expresses similar sentiments: “Am I a king, and must be overruled?” (I.i.135); “I see I must, and therefore am content” (I.iv.85); “Must! 'Tis somewhat hard, when kings must go” (IV.vi.82); “But tell me, must I now resign my crown . . . ?” (V.i.36); “But what the heavens appoint, I must obey. / Here, take my crown; the life of Edward too . . .” (V.i.56–57); “And needs I must resign my wishèd crown” (V.i.70).

Shakespeare's insight that Richard's very identity is symbolically bound up with his crown also has a precedent in Marlowe's character, who in his torment finds no comfort “But that I feel the crown upon my head,” and therefore begs to “wear it yet awhile” (V.i.82–83). Richard II is also shown as physically attached to the crown, holding on to it tenaciously in the bucket-and-well speech. Richard's elaborate meditation in prison, where a multitude “of still-breeding thoughts” (*Richard II*, V.v.8) peoples his consciousness, may have been suggested by Edward's “strange despairing thoughts, / Which thoughts are martyrèd with endless torments” (*Edward II*, V.i.79–80). Nor is it impossible that for the language in which Richard's queen rebukes her husband's passivity Shakespeare again drew upon Marlowe's play:

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<sup>34</sup> Some critics have regarded the scene in which Aumerle's mother, the Duchess of York, begs Henry IV for her son's pardon as “comic,” since the king remarks with a touch of levity that “Our scene is alt'ered from a serious thing, / And now chang'd to ‘The Beggar and the King’ ” (V.iii.79–80). There is indeed a humorous aspect to this episode, but its central issue, the life or death of a would-be traitor, can scarcely be considered comic in the usual sense of the term.

The lion dying thrusteth forth his paw,  
And wounds the earth, if nothing else, with rage  
To be o'erpow'r'd; and wilt thou, pupil-like,  
Take the correction, mildly kiss the rod,  
And fawn on rage with base humility,  
Which art a lion and a king of beasts?

(*Richard II*, V.i.29-34)

Of course the lion-king and schoolboy metaphors are not uncommon, but in combination, they suggest a possible indebtedness to two different passages from *Edward II*—one in which the king inveighs against his barons ("shall the crowing of these cockerels / Affright a lion? Edward, unfold thy paws . . ." [II.ii.201-2]) and the other, already mentioned above, in which Baldock urges the king to assert himself and so resist being treated like "a schoolboy" who "must be awed and governed like a child" (III.ii.30-31).

Comparison of the two dramas has tended, justly enough, to stress differences rather than similarities. Shakespeare's play, unlike Marlowe's, is almost wholly devoid of violence, and the one physical assault that does occur (Richard's murder) rouses the king to an act of heroic resistance that contrasts markedly with Edward's helpless abjection. *Richard II* employs the language and tone of ritual in conjunction with the visual formalism of pageantry. The theme of divine right and of the sacredness of royalty imparts to the central figure and to the ethos that surrounds him what Coleridge called an "attention to decorum and high feeling of the kingly dignity,"<sup>35</sup> all of which helps to associate the deposition less with political necessities than with sacrilege and its attendant guilt. His tyrannies set aside, the verbal fancy and theatrical self-indulgence of Richard complicate our response to his sacramental claims, but the play nevertheless enacts a martyrdom, however partially self-induced—a "passion" that makes the comparisons to Christ and Pilate something more than childish or absurd hyperboles. Shakespeare's tragedy is rooted in a love of country that reveals itself in numerous ways, not least in the stylizations of the quasi-allegorical garden scene and

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<sup>35</sup> T. M. Raysor, ed., *Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.; Harvard Univ. Press, 1930), 1:144.

in Gaunt's speech on England as "This other Eden, demi-paradise" (II.i.42). A profoundly national, almost mythic, grief lies at the heart of the play—a grief of which the principal voice is the refined but languorous eloquence of its suffering monarch. All of this is Shakespeare's doing.<sup>36</sup> Certainly nothing of it was to be found in Marlowe's more brutish and less luxuriantly worded effort.

Nevertheless it may be appropriate to conclude this survey of uneasy creative interchanges by drawing attention to two passages in *Richard II* that seem to bespeak the continuing presence of Marlowe's dramaturgy in the consciousness or half-consciousness of his rival. Although both have been noticed in the past, neither has seemed to deserve much critical attention. The first concerns Bolingbroke's illegal condemnation of Bushy and Green—an early indication of how ruthless, and therefore how ambitious, the usurper (despite his diplomatic posture to Richard in a later scene) is capable of being. The doomed men remain silent, doubtless recognizing the futility of defending themselves, but among the charges levelled at them we find one that rings particularly hollow:

You have in manner with your sinful hours  
Made a divorce betwixt his queen and him,  
Broke the possession of a royal bed,  
And stain'd the beauty of a fair queen's cheeks  
With tears drawn from her eyes by your foul wrongs.  
(III.i.11–15)

The implication of homosexual attachments between the king and his flatterers—attachments that have brought grief to the queen and wrecked her marriage—has no historical validity and obviously contradicts the impression of devoted fidelity between Richard and his consort that Shakespeare is at pains to build up throughout the

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<sup>36</sup> Interesting new light on the thematic connection between the garden scene and Gaunt's dying speech idealizing England emerges in the recent researches of Donald W. Foster; see "Reconstructing Shakespeare 1: The Roles That Shakespeare Performed," *Shakespeare Newsletter* 41.1–2 (Spring-Summer, 1991), 16–17. On the basis of vocabulary patterns and the incidence of rare words throughout the canon, Foster attempts to specify the roles that Shakespeare took as an actor in his own plays. If the theory is correct and the evidence (yet to be presented in detail) can be trusted, Shakespeare may have played both Gaunt and the Gardener in *Richard II*.



play. Holinshed does mention the sexual immorality of Richard's court ("there reigned abundantlie the filthie sinne of lecherie and fornication, with abhominable adulterie, speciallie in the king, but most cheefelie in the prelatie")<sup>37</sup> but is nowhere specific about homoeroticism. The anonymous *Woodstock* is equally vague on the point. The obvious source would seem to be *Edward II*, in which the sexual relationship between Edward and Gaveston is not only unmistakable but also produces grief and jealousy in Isabella. Shakespeare probably recalled her hostile words to Gaveston:

thou corrupts my lord  
And art a bawd to his affections. . . .

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<sup>37</sup> Holinshed, *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, 2:869. Bradbrook notes that in *Richard II* "the homosexual element is so played down that Bushy, Bagot and Green seem almost irrelevant" ("Shakespeare's Recollections of Marlowe," 196); but, apart from Bolingbroke's unsupported statement, no explicit homosexuality appears anywhere in the play. Actors and theatrical directors, however, perhaps with Marlowe's precedent in mind, have sometimes seized upon the opportunity to present Richard as dallying sexually with his favorites or at least to imply as much. John Gielgud in his 1929 characterization of Richard at the Old Vic and again at the Queen's Theatre in 1937 imparted a certain languid effeminacy to the role; and Michael Redgrave in his Stratford-upon-Avon performance of 1951 played the character (in the words of Sir Laurence Olivier) "as an out-and-out pussy queer, with mincing gestures to match." John Justin also exaggerated the king's supposed homosexual tendencies in his Old Vic portrayal of 1959. Ian McKellan acted both Edward II and Richard II on alternating nights in a Prospect Company offering of 1968-70, thus stressing the close relationship of the two protagonists. A French production of Shakespeare's play in 1970 at the Odéon-Théâtre de France with Patrice Chéreau in the lead emphasized homoeroticism in the monarch, and Ian Richardson in 1974 (at a Royal Shakespeare Company production at the Brooklyn Academy of Music) played Richard, to quote a New York critic, as "a distasteful, flaming queen." The BBC television production of 1978 starring Derek Jacobi (recorded on a Time-Life video cassette) showed the king relaxing with his minions in a state of semi-nakedness with obvious overtones of homosexuality. Finally, Zoe Caldwell's 1979 production of *Richard II* at Stratford, Ontario (with three different actors playing the title role on different evenings) also made much of the alleged homosexuality: at one point "Richard took Aumerle's hand for comfort, and then Aumerle stealthily put his arm round Richard's waist. Richard also gently put a hand on Bushy's knee, while always keeping his distance from his Queen. . . ." See Malcolm Page, *Richard II: Text and Performance* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, 1987), 49, 70; also Josephine A. Roberts, *Richard II: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988), 2:376, 420, 444.



Villain, 'tis thou that robb'st me of my lord.

(*Edward II*, I.iv.150-60)<sup>38</sup>

But why did Shakespeare introduce this apparently groundless charge into his own play? Probably, I would suggest, he saw it as a subtle means of undermining our respect for Bolingbroke at a point in the action where he needed to begin manipulating audience sympathies in the direction of Richard. The words convey expediency and underhandedness in the speaker, who is shown to behave in the episode like a military dictator presiding at a show trial of expendable dissidents.

The second probable debt to Marlowe occurs in the famous "mirror speech" of the deposition scene when Richard gazes narcissistically into the glass that not only gratifies his vanity but also symbolizes the painful acknowledgement of his folly. The shattering of the mirror is both a theatricalization of his grief and an emblem of his self-destruction, a way of coping with the unbridgeable divide between the divinity that hedges kings and the "nothing" to which his flawed reign as a mortal has now reduced him. As nearly every editor observes, the rhetoric here echoes the equally memorable address to Helen of Troy in *Doctor Faustus* ("Was this the face that launched a thousand ships / And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?" [V.i.99-100]):

Was this face the face  
That every day under his household roof  
Did keep ten thousand men? Was this the face  
That, like the sun, did make beholders wink?  
Is this the face which fac'd so many follies,  
And was at last out-fac'd by Bolingbroke?  
A brittle glory shineth in this face—  
As brittle as the glory is the face,

[*Dashes the looking-glass against the ground.*]

For there it is, crack'd in an hundred shivers.

(*Richard II*, IV.i.282-90)

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<sup>38</sup> Also Isabella, about to depart for France, intends to complain to her brother "How Gaveston hath robbed me of [Edward's] love" (II.iv.67).

For Elizabethans who could recall the context of Marlowe's great speech, this echo would be rich in dramatic irony, for of course Helen was not only the supreme icon of beauty and sensual desire but also the source of Troy's ruin and therefore a tragic emblem of civilization destroyed.<sup>39</sup> Also, in Marlowe's play, the image of Helen that Faustus confronts is probably a succuba; hence she becomes an agent of damnation whom he himself has asked Mephistophilis to summon and in whose embrace he desires to obliterate his pain. Faustus, like Richard, has courted his own destruction. Marlowe's passage, then, complicates and enriches Shakespeare's by enlarging its context, by extending and deepening its tragic implications. The tension between appearance and reality, already present in the mirror situation, takes on a fresh and more cosmic dimension.

Nor does Shakespeare seem entirely to have abandoned a consciousness of *Edward II* in this scene, however divergent from Edward's character Richard's behavior at this point may appear to be. Possibly he recalled Lancaster's scornful comparison of Gaveston to "the Greekish strumpet" who "trained to arms / And bloody wars so many valiant knights" (*Edward II*, II.v.15-16), but there may also be a subtler connection. After the smashing of the glass, Bolingbroke comments on the essential unreality of Richard's posturing, and Richard cleverly answers him:

*Bolingbroke.* The shadow of your sorrow hath destroy'd  
The shadow of your face.

*King Richard.* Say that again.

The shadow of my sorrow? Ha! Let's see.

'Tis very true, my grief lies all within;

And these external manners of laments

Are merely shadows to the unseen grief

That swells with silence in the tortur'd soul.

There lies the substance.... (IV.i.293-300)

The verbal agility and quickness of mind that Richard's response displays here could scarcely contrast more starkly with the intellectu-

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<sup>39</sup> Marlowe's speech seems to have lodged in Shakespeare's consciousness, for the dramatist echoes it again in *Troilus and Cressida*: Troilus refers to Helen as "a pearl / Whose price hath launch'd above a thousand ships" (II.ii.81-82).

ally limited personality of his counterpart in Marlowe. Yet this dialogue, exploring, as it does, opposing attitudes to the significance of shadows in a context of self-pity and lost kingship, could well have grown out of Edward's most familiar and affecting lines:

But what are kings when regiment is gone,  
But perfect shadows in a sunshine day?

(*Edward II*, V.i.26-27)

And, as we have seen, this is a speech that Marlowe in his turn could have derived from the image of the "shadow" king (Edward IV) in *3 Henry VI*. If so, the pedigree of Richard II's lines may extend through Marlowe back to an earlier Shakespearean play. But to speculate on the blood lines of individual images in a drama as fluid and absorptive as that of Marlowe and Shakespeare may be to consider too curiously.<sup>40</sup> It seems safe to conclude at any rate that even after the creator of Tamburlaine, Edward II, and Doctor Faustus had ceased to make plays, his poetic shadow continued to hover, sometimes creatively, sometimes disturbingly, over his rival and successor.

## V

What becomes obvious from a study of the Shakespeare-Marlowe interconnection with regard to the evolution of the historical genre is not only that both playwrights were attracted to similar human and political subjects but also that each, tending to view the reality and effects of civil chaos from somewhat different perspectives, invented appropriately distinctive forms by means of which to express these differing visions theatrically. Shakespeare tended to see

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<sup>40</sup> Perhaps we should also recall here the Dauphin Lewis's elaborately Petrarchan sun-shadow wordplay in response to his father's offer of Blanch as a prospective bride:  
in her eye I find

A wonder, or a wondrous miracle,  
The shadow of myself form'd in her eye,  
Which, being but the shadow of your son,

Becomes a sun and makes your son a shadow. (*King John*, II.i.496-500)

But the context here is more romantic than political and has nothing to do with the loss of a crown. See also note 23 above.

history as process—as a continuity in which divine and human agency are interactively operative, the longer and the more immediate conceptions of causality often intersecting to produce the kinds of irony that are notable, say, in the deposition scene of *Richard II*, which effectively juxtaposes the Bishop of Carlisle's baleful prophecy of future disaster with Northumberland's expedient silencing of ecclesiastical opposition for the purpose of insuring the orderly transfer of power at a moment of national crisis. Such a technique undoubtedly reflects the significantly providential element in Shakespeare's idea of history and goes far to explain the tendency of his plays to arrange themselves in sequences even if they were not planned as tetralogies from the outset. In contrast, Marlowe's historical vision seems to have been more radically skeptical, fragmentary, and personal. Notions of divine providence, for instance, have been virtually excluded from *Edward II*; nor can we imagine Marlowe (even if the brevity of his life had permitted) writing plays on the reigns of Edward I and Edward III in which the tragedy of Edward II could have been ominously incipient or sadly remembered. Also Marlowe seems to have been more concerned with individuals than with institutions—more interested in the uniqueness of Edward II as a man than in the cultural symbolism of the crown he is compelled to forfeit. Accordingly the shape of Marlowe's play is designed to dramatize the terrible intensity of sexual politics—to render powerfully on the stage the psycho-political crises generated by the relatedness of homoerotic passion, a royal dependency on minions, the inversion of traditional class distinctions, the jealousy of a rejected spouse, double adultery, treason, civil war, and regicide by a method that grotesquely parodies the sexual passivity of its victim. One not untypical critic points to the profound pessimism of *Edward II*—a pessimism that appears to override even the restored "order" of the concluding scene with its punishments of Mortimer and Isabella at the hands of a child monarch—by writing that "The characters finger their way along the edges of a metaphysical darkness, and collide in the confusion of their attitudes..."<sup>41</sup> Shakespeare's outlook, at least in his English histories, is never so dark, even when he too is dramatizing the savagery of civil strife and the naked ambition

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<sup>41</sup> Malcolm Kelsall, *Christopher Marlowe* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 47.



of power-seekers like York, Gloucester, and Northumberland.

Although the interests of Shakespeare and Marlowe patently converged in the pages of Holinshed, their attitudes and artistic sensibilities impelled them even from the beginning in different directions. The rich genre that developed in large part out of their mutually reactive experimentation had to be flexible and capacious enough to accommodate the variety of dramatic possibilities suggested by the diverse dramas on which this essay has centered. Rooted in the cycle and morality plays of the Middle Ages, the sixteenth-century chronicle play would rapidly expand beyond a concentration on national, personal, and social disaster, the themes that constituted its primary focus in the earliest examples, to become hospitable to literary kinds and traditions as superficially remote from tragedy as romance, satire, comedy, biography, and epic. It is possible, nevertheless, to discern the beginnings of such exfoliation as early as *Henry VI*, *Richard III*, *Edward II*, and *Richard II*—the series of historical dramas in which the Shakespeare-Marlowe symbiosis is most visible.

Joseph Candido

“Women & fooles break off your  
conference”: Pope’s Degradations  
and the Form of *King John*

The literary critic who seeks by indirections to find directions out may well run the risk of unhappy comparisons with Polonius. Nevertheless, I should like to approach the vexed matter of form in Shakespeare’s *King John* both indirectly and from a considerable distance in time, using as my critical locus the controversial edition of the play in Alexander Pope’s *Works of Mr William Shakespeare* (1723–5). In so doing I am suggesting, at least implicitly, that our understanding of Shakespearean “form” can be addressed just as profitably by following the editorial afterlife of a play as by examining the formal pressures exerted upon it by its literary sources, analogues, or cultural context. On the face of it, this hardly seems a remarkable statement to make; yet how often in treating the formal qualities of Shakespeare’s histories do we turn to the literary or cultural genetics of the text (the chronicles, court politics, *De casibus* tragedy, the morality play, etc.) while neglecting or trivializing a complex and influential editorial tradition that willy nilly has exerted a formidable influence on interpretive and performance history? The neglect seems particularly unfortunate in those fascinating cases when two powerful literary minds from different cultural periods

come together, the one exercising editorial authority over the other, as in the landmark eighteenth-century editions of Shakespeare by Pope (1723–25) and Johnson (1765). The latter, of course, has received a good deal of critical attention (indeed its own modern critical edition); the former, strangely, has not.

We have much to learn about Shakespearean form from Pope, but we must learn it, as Polonius might say, with an “assay of bias” or scholarly indirection that sometimes contradicts our normal investigative procedures. In the case of *King John*, for example, customary treatments of the form of the play start with its actual or purported sources (Holinshed, Hall, Foxe, Bale, *The Troublesome Raigne*, etc.), generally regarding these as a sort of historical template, the deviations from which give hints of Shakespeare’s formal and artistic design.<sup>1</sup> In cases such as this we presume to guess at Shakespeare’s formal or ideological purposes simply because they seem so enticingly palpable against the background of a whole series of earlier “purposes” from which they both derive and deviate. But Shakespearean texts may well have distinct formal purposes that remain hidden (or at least unobserved) until they collide with a later editorial or critical purpose that thrusts them into view. Such, I would argue, occurs in Pope’s edition of *King John*. Here, at the confluence of Shakespearean and Popean notions of dramatic taste, Shakespearean form appears by indirection—emerging not by comparison with source or analogue, but through the intrepid editorial intrusions of a poet who set about to improve what he found formally or aesthetically deficient in his great forebear. Pope himself described Shakespeare’s works admiringly as “an ancient majestick piece of *Gothick Architecture*”;<sup>2</sup> in marring slightly—yet decidedly—some familiar details of the outer surface of *King John*, he gave us a revealing and subtly altered re-vision of its structural form.

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<sup>1</sup> A classic and laudable example of this method is the “running comparison” that Geoffrey Bullough provides to demonstrate the “close relationship” that exists between *The Troublesome Raigne* and Shakespeare’s play, and to buttress his contention that *TR* is the earlier text. See *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* vol. 4 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, [1962] 1975), 9–24.

<sup>2</sup> I quote from the preface to Pope’s edition, *The Works of Mr William Shakespeare*, 8 vols. (London: Jacob Tonson, 1723–25), 1:xxiii. Subsequent references to Pope’s edition are noted parenthetically.

Of the fifteen hundred "excessively bad" lines that suffer degradation to the bottom of the page in Pope's edition as unworthy of Shakespeare's genius, nearly ten percent of the total (about one hundred and forty eight lines) drop from *King John*.<sup>3</sup> Thus degraded, its disproportionally large number of fallen passages the sad badge of Popean disapproval, the play stands literally de-formed, a sort of oddly prophetic monument to its own critical future. But even so intrusive an edition as Pope's (replete with such editorial flourishes as stars prefixed to scenes of unusual beauty, inverted commas in the margins indicating "shining" passages, degradations in reduced type, silent omissions, and even occasional interpolations) fails to produce cataclysmic structural or formal dislocations in the text of *King John*. This is not to say, however, that Pope's changes are insignificant; the version of the play that Pope presents to his readers is different enough in form from its Shakespearean original to invite both curiosity and serious scholarly regard. Just what kind of a play did Pope produce, and why did he produce it?

Even the most cursory glance at Pope's text of *King John* reveals some striking patterns of excision. For example, over eighty-five percent of the lines that Pope banishes come from the first three acts of the play; that is, before the scene in which Arthur dissuades Hubert from murdering him. Furthermore, the most thoroughly "degraded" character in *King John* is Constance; fully one quarter of her role disappears from the play (her rejected lines comprising almost half the total number Pope consigns to the bottom of the

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<sup>3</sup> Pope, 1:22. For discussions of Pope's editorial practice see Maynard Mack, *Alexander Pope: A Life* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1985), 418-26; James R. Sutherland, "'The Dull Duty of an Editor,'" *Review of English Studies* 21 (1945): 202-15; reprinted in *Essential Articles for the Study of Alexander Pope*, revised and enlarged edition, ed. Maynard Mack (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1968), 675-94; P. Dixon, "Pope's Shakespeare," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 63 (1964): 191-203; David Nichol Smith, *Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), 29-60; Ronald B. McKerrow, "The Treatment of Shakespeare's Text by His Earlier Editors, 1709-1768," in *Studies in Shakespeare*, ed. Peter Alexander (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), 103-31; and A. D. J. Brown, "The Little Fellow Has Done Wonders: Pope as Shakespeare Editor," *The Cambridge Quarterly* 21 (1992): 120-49. Brown, who deals primarily with Pope's edition of *Romeo and Juliet*, argues that Pope's alterations of the First Folio text with reference to Q1, rather than imposing a reflexive and distorting neo-classicism on Shakespeare, actually bring us closer to the original.



page, the majority of these coming during her raucous shouting-match with Elinor in II.i). Thus the play as Pope reproduces it is formally altered in two clearly identifiable ways: 1) its first three acts are noticeably shortened by some one hundred and twenty lines, and 2) its most rhetorically excessive and outright "stagy" role is severely truncated.

Instructive in helping us assess the effects of such textual changes on the form of *King John* is a recent article by Felicity Rosslyn that approaches the matter of "form" in Pope's poetry from a revealing perspective. In a provocative reading of the *Epistle to a Lady*, Rosslyn argues that the poem hinges on "the charge that women are essentially lacking in form."<sup>4</sup> She cites the opening lines (which include a witticism attributed to Martha Blount) as Pope's first rhetorical volley in a continual assault on the "formlessness" of women:

Nothing so true as what you once let fall,  
'Most Women have no Characters at all.'  
Matter too soft a lasting mark to bear,  
And best distinguish'd by black, brown, or fair.  
(lines 1-4)

Rosslyn ably demonstrates the poem's contention that although "women are incapable of bearing a 'lasting mark,' they take a temporary one very well"; she then relates this notion to Pope's alleged fear that he as a "poet," always searching for artistic form, is curiously related to the "lady" of his poem, who changes chameleon-like from one social identity to another: "She moves from Magdalen to Cecelia, as he might turn from *Eloisa* to *Abelard* to an *Ode* for the musical saint; and perhaps part of his irritation stems from the suspicion that he and the lady are not unrelated" (57). Rosslyn's summation of this phase of her argument is particularly useful:

The great difference between him and the lady, however, is that he creates poems external to himself, while she is actually abandoning herself to the genres, in the hope of finding

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<sup>4</sup> "'Dipt in the Rainbow': Pope on 'Women,'" in *The Enduring Legacy: Alexander Pope Tercentenary Essays*, ed. G. S. Rousseau and Pat Rogers (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988), 51-62. Subsequent references to this article are noted parenthetically.

who she is. She is, so to speak, the stuff of a poem in search of its form, a Dionysiac creature in search of Apollonian bounds; and his satirical portraits are strung between two opposed choices, both equally offensive to his taste as an artist. The one is perfect formlessness, which as we have seen, makes meaning impossible; and the other, of trusting wholly to external form, which is too weakly related to the inner content to yield a meaning either. Pope's discontent with women is the kind of aesthetic discontent he would have in the midst of an anthology of bad poetry. (58)

Rosslyn's memorable coda evokes the rhetoric—if not the critical ideology—of James R. Sutherland, who in his analysis of Pope's editorial practice notes matter-of-factly that the style of the Elizabethans was to Pope "quite simply a bad style," one necessarily rejected, or at the very least disparaged, by the sophisticated literati of the eighteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Pope, a dedicated advocate of "taste" over "mere learning" in editorial matters (684), thus had no compunction whatever (to borrow a phrase from *King John*) "to set a form upon that indigest" Shakespeare's text occasionally presented to him; that is, to bring the "excessively bad" in the earlier poet into harmony with his (and the age's) superior notions of acceptable style and form. What makes Pope's alterations of *King John* so interesting, however, is his location of so much of what is "bad" in the play in the person of its most compelling female character. The literary and personal concerns that Rosslyn sees as influencing Pope in the *Epistle to a Lady* (i.e., the aversion to "Dionysiac" formlessness and its psychological association with women and bad poetry) may thus be seen as having an effect—subtle yet palpable—on Pope's "tasteful" reformation of the text of *King John*.

Predictably enough, Pope tends to degrade those passages in which strained punning, impassioned argument, or extravagant emotion dominate the action. Hence seventy-eight lines drop from the lively episode

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<sup>5</sup> Sutherland, 689 (reprinted version); subsequent references to this article are noted parenthetically. See also Smith, 7-10; and Harold Child, "Shakespeare in the Theatre from the Restoration to the Present Time," in *A Companion to Shakespeare Studies*, ed. Harley Granville-Barker and G. B. Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1934), 331-39.

before Angiers (II.i), where Pope eliminates completely the rhetorically explosive dialogue between Elinor and Constance.<sup>6</sup> Here Pope takes a vibrant scene, full of brisk colloquialism and punning wordplay suggestive of the instability of meaning and the relativity of words, and smoothes it out into a decorous (and exclusively male) episode focusing on war and politics.<sup>7</sup> Pope's re-formation of the scene presents a seamless political discussion between the kings of France and England that ends with the blare of trumpets and the entrance of the Citizen (Hubert?) above on the city walls; the whole business never suffers interruption (as it does in the Shakespearean original) by the impromptu punning and sheer verbal excess that serves as the vehicle for "Dionysiac" female emotion. Characteristic of the degraded passages is the intemperate and vicious interchange between Elinor and Constance as they vie for the affection of Arthur:

*Queen.* Come to thy grandame child.

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*Cons.* Doe childe, goe to yt grandame childe,  
Giue grandame kingdome, and it grandame will  
Giue yt a plum, a cherry, and a figge,  
There's a good grandame.

*Arthur.* Good my mother peace,  
I would that I were low laid in my graue,  
I am not worth this coyle that's made for me.

*Qu. Mo.* His mother shames him so, poore boy hee  
weepes.

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<sup>6</sup> I use the act and scene divisions as marked in *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, third edition, ed. David Bevington (Glenview, Ill.: Scott Foresman and Company, 1980). Textual references to *King John* are cited from the Norton Facsimile of *The First Folio of Shakespeare*, ed. Charlton Hinman (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968); line numbers are the through line numbers provided by Hinman in the margins of the text. I use Hinman's edition of F1 because of its accessibility and the ease with which passages may be located in it. Pope's edition was based on the edition of Nicholas Rowe (1714), with consultation of the Fourth Folio of Shakespeare (1685) and very likely Folio One (1623). All citations of *King John* and other Shakespearean plays, when not taken from Hinman, are from Bevington's edition.

<sup>7</sup> For some provocative remarks on the nature of women in chronicle-histories and *King John* in particular, see Phyllis Rackin, "Patriarchal History and Female Subversion in *King John*," in *"King John": New Perspectives*, ed. Deborah T. Curren-Aquino (Newark, Del.: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1989), 76-90.

*Con.* Now shame vpon you where she does or no, 469  
 His grandames wrongs, and not his mothers shames  
 Drawes those heauen-mouing pearles frō his poor eies,  
 Which heauen shall take in nature of a fee:  
 I, with these Christall beads heauen shall be brib'd  
 To doe him Iustice, and reuenge on you.

*Qu.* Thou monstrous slanderer of heauen and earth.

*Con.* Thou monstrous Iniurer of heauen and earth,  
 Call me not slanderer, thou and thine vsurpe  
 The Dominations, Royalties, and rights  
 Of this oppressed boy; this is thy eldest sonnes sonne,  
 Infortunate in nothing but in thee: 480  
 Thy sinnes are visited in this poore childe,  
 The Canon of the Law is laide on him,  
 Being but the second generation  
 Remoued from thy sinne-conceiuing wombe.

*Iohn.* Bedlam haue done.

*Con.* I haue but this to say,  
 - That he is not onely plagued for her sin,  
 But God hath made her sinne and her, the plague  
 On this remoued issue, plagued for her,  
 And with her plague her sinne: his iniury 490  
 Her iniurie the Beadle to her sinne,  
 All punish'd in the person of this childe,  
 And all for her, a plague vpon her.

*Que.* Thou vnaduised scold, I can produce  
 A Will, that barres the title of thy sonne.

*Con.* I who doubts that, a Will: a wicked will,  
 A womans will, a cankred Grandams will.

*Fra.* Peace Lady, pause, or be more temperate,  
 It ill beseemes this presence to cry ayme  
 To these ill-tuned repetitions. . . . 500

In an essay that sheds some light on Pope's treatment of this section of the play, Juliet Dusinberre observes that the unseemly viciousness of the dialogue between Elinor and Constance has repeatedly presented problems for critics and directors, particularly male critics and male directors:



Indeed some kind of directorial embarrassment has often accompanied productions of *King John*, resulting in the cutting of the scolding between Eleanor and Constance. [A. C.] Sprague records a judgement in the *Monthly Mirror* for 1810, that it was a relief that the 'Billingsgate scene' between Eleanor and Constance had been cut. Sprague himself thinks the scene best understood in terms of 'the formal defiances before battle, so frequent on the Elizabethan stage,' and declares that the homely interchanges between the women which appeal to a modern audience 'would certainly have been embarrassing to spectators brought up on the neo-classical ideas of decorum.'<sup>8</sup>

This last statement, as Sutherland and others have noted, could hardly apply more fittingly to any literary figure of the eighteenth century than to Pope. Yet neither a scrupulous concern for "decorum," nor what Dusiemberre calls the "embarrassing" women of *King John* who constantly appall male critics by calling patriarchal power into question, were the only likely pressures influencing Pope as he set about re-forming Shakespeare's play. For precisely that combination of female capriciousness and bad poetry that Rosslyn sees as reflecting Pope's own artistic anxieties in the *Epistle to a Lady* would have joined unhappily here—at least to Pope's way of thinking—in the "ill-tuned repetitions" that pervade the scene. The sort of homespun colloquialism and repetitive wordplay reflective for Pope of a female sensibility descending to mere rant clearly had no place, as he undoubtedly saw it, in any judicious representation of Shakespeare's works. As he implies in the preface to his edition, such passages have no real formal or structural purpose in their respective plays; indeed they are so extraneous "that one can intirely omit them without any chasm, or deficiencie in the context" (1:xxii). They are, in short, violations of "form" with the full range of Popean associations—social, psychological, and literary—it may be possible to apply to that term.

Noteworthy in this regard are the brief remarks of Constance

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<sup>8</sup> "King John and Embarrassing Women," *Shakespeare Survey* 42 (1990): 40; Dusiemberre's quotation of Sprague is taken from *Shakespeare and the Actors: The Stage Business in His Plays (1660-1905)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1945), 14.

(ll. 486–93, 496–97), which are absolutely typical of the kind of “bad poetry” Pope cuts from the play. The lines are peppered—to borrow France’s expression once more—with precisely those impulsive “ill-tuned repetitions” Pope regarded as the uncouth and vulgar underpinnings of shapeless poor taste. Constance’s fervid straining for rhetorical terms to fit her emotional distress produces something like an echo chamber of pointless (formless?) sound. In the course of merely ten lines she is able to harp on the following words with a sort of metronomic tenacity: “sin” (four times), “will” (four times), “plague” (five times), “her” (ten times).<sup>9</sup> Such rhetorical overkill allows even the most serene reader to sympathize with the degraded attitude of poor France, “Peace Lady, pause, or be more temperate” (l. 498). But France should have spoken earlier; for even before Constance’s rhetorical blur we have heard a verbal exercise between two ferocious women in which repetitive parody serves, ambivalently, both as a mode of attack and as an outlet for genuine emotion. Considering the high frequency of such rhetorical constructs throughout the dialogue between Elinor and Constance, one can easily see why Pope averted his Augustan glance. What was the author of the *Epistle to a Lady* to make of the opening sequence of the passage cited above, with its vicious baby talk, sputtering insults, and relentless heaving to and fro of such problematic and outright homely designations as “grandame,” “mother,” “child,” “son,” and the like? All this was simply too “Dionysiac,” too formlessly female for Pope—and down the passage dropped.

Interesting in this regard is the fact that Margaret in the *Henry VI* plays and in *Richard III*, a character whose ragings on the surface would seem to have much in common with those of Constance,

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<sup>9</sup> Such repetitions, of course, occur many times throughout *King John*, and it is important to note that Pope does not degrade them all. Consider, for example, the following interchange between Pandolph and Constance which Pope leaves in the play. The passage is typical of many such that remain in Pope’s text:

*Pan.* There’s Law and Warrant (Lady) for my curse.

*Cons.* And for mine, too, when Law can do no right.

Let it be lawfull, that Law barre no wrong;

Law cannot giue my childe his kingdome heere;

For he that holds his Kingdome, holds the Law:

Therefore since Law it selfe is perfect wrong,

How can the Law forbid my tongue to curse? (lines 1112–18)

suffers virtually no diminution of her role in Pope's edition. Why would Pope so heavily degrade the impassioned speeches of the one and not of the other? One possible explanation could lie in the radically different nature of the two women and in their relationship to men in their respective plays. As David Bevington points out, as far back as *1 Henry VI* Margaret represents a type of the "Amazonian woman" who subjugates men and then destroys them.<sup>10</sup> Never retiring, she is the only Shakespearean female other than Joan of Arc actually to confront a man on the field of battle, mocking York to his face during the horrific "molehill" scene (*3 Henry VI*, I.iv). In *Richard III*, even after her demise (indeed historically, if not dramatically, after her death) she shows the same relish for confrontational and threatening behavior that was her hallmark throughout the *Henry VI* plays. Her ragings, unlike Constance's, are not the helpless laments of a powerless and "embarrassing" female; for in *Richard III* she develops into a menacing figure in her own right as well as an agent of divine retribution—and her curses wield real force. Rhetorically, too, she differs markedly from Constance, eschewing pointless repetitive wordplay for a different form of repetition that sounds the rolling cadences of cosmic will:

Though not by war, by surfeit die your king,  
 As ours by murder, to make him a king!  
 Edward thy son, that now is Prince of Wales,  
 For Edward our son, that was Prince of Wales,  
 Die in his youth by like untimely violence!  
 Thyself a queen, for me that was a queen,  
 Outlive thy glory, like my wretched self!

(I.iii.196–202)<sup>11</sup>

There is viciousness here, but it is the composed viciousness of one whose power over events is clear and undoubted. Whereas Constance sputters on—genuinely but powerlessly—in a kaleidoscope of reflect-

<sup>10</sup> "The Domineering Female in *1 Henry VI*," *Shakespeare Studies* 2 (1966): 52.

<sup>11</sup> It could, of course, be argued here that Pope is most offended by repetition for its own sake rather than by anything "female" or offensively emotional about it. My point, however, is that Constance's repetitions are perceived by Pope as *different* from Margaret's, and that Pope is responding to that difference rather than to the mere fact of excessive repetition. On Pope's repetitions see Brown, *passim*.

ing words, Margaret recounts with grim poise the notes of impending disaster. She talks like a vengeful soldier, not some archetypal female victim of male violence. And Pope leaves her alone.

Pope's "tasteful" intrusions are reserved for verbal maneuvering such as Constance's, where a character vents emotion by playing almost gratuitously with the formless instability of words. Hence he banishes the following lines to the lower margin, the common element of which is a strained wordplay that, when judged by Pope's canons of taste, would be seen to trivialize rather than elevate real feeling:

[*Dol.*] The shadow of my selfe form'd in her eye,  
Which being but the shadow of your sonne,  
Becomes a sonne and makes your sonne a shadow.  
(lines 814-16)

*Sal.* What other harme haue I good Lady done,  
But spoke the harme, that is by others done?

*Con.* Which harme within it selfe so heynous is,  
As it makes harmefull all that speake of it.  
(lines 959-62)

[*Con.*] Preach some Philosophy to make me mad,  
And thou shalt be Canoniz'd (Cardinall.)  
For, being not mad, but sensible of greefe,  
My reasonable part produces reason  
How I may be deliuer'd of these woes,  
And teaches mee to kill or hang my selfe:  
If I were mad, I should forget my sonne,  
Or madly thinke a babe of clowts were he. . . .  
(lines 1435-42)

The crowning degradation of this sort, however, comes in a repetitive quintet dominated, predictably, by Constance. In the space of merely twelve lines, Shakespeare treats us to a dizzying rhetorical onslaught that manages to sound some variation of meaning or form in nine separate words: "life," "death," "up," "down," "move/remove," "answer," "faith," "hang," "need,"—the last echoing laboriously some seven times:

*Bla.* The Lady *Constance* speakes not from her faith,  
But from her need.



Con. Oh, if thou grant my need,  
 Which onely liues but by the death of faith,  
 That need, must needs inferre this principle,  
 That faith would liue againe by death of need:  
 O then tread downe my need, and faith mounts vp,  
 Keepe my need vp, and faith is trodden downe.

Iohn. The king is moud, and answers not to this.

Con. O be remou'd from him, and answere well.

Aust. Doe so king *Philip*, hang no more in doubt.

Bast. Hang nothing but a Calues skin most sweet lout.

(lines 1140-51)

Here is precisely the radical instability of meaning (the "perfect formlessness" that Rosslyn perceives in the *Epistle to a Lady*) that merges in Pope's mind with the female and bad art. Surely A. R. Braunmuller is right in calling Constance's repeated punning on "need" here "characteristic logic-chopping" on her part.<sup>12</sup> The whole episode exudes a sense of verbal embroidery for its own sake, a sort of ensemble wordplay with Constance as verbal lightning rod that draws our attention merely toward language rather than toward the complex of ideas and emotions it purports to express. Compare the similar passage in *King Lear* (II.iv.264ff.), where, as Robert B. Heilman has observed, Lear's punning on the same word "not only defines the effect upon humanity of the use of mere need as a measuring stick for perquisites, but . . . shrewdly demonstrates that his daughters do not themselves observe the canon of need."<sup>13</sup> The integral complexity of Lear's play on words ends with the old king's prayer for "true need"; i.e., the fortitude and patience he so painfully acquires and then loses in the course of the tragedy.

Little wonder, then, that Pope saw fit to degrade Constance in this instance and so repeatedly in *King John*; her incessant yet frequently gratuitous wordplay, emotional extravagance, and sheer rhetorical abandon fairly allegorized for him the worst aesthetic tendencies his Augustan sensibilities could conceive. Exiling her from

<sup>12</sup> *The Life and Death of King John* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 181.

<sup>13</sup> *This Great Stage: Image and Structure in "King Lear"* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1948), 169.

the play, of course, was out of the question; too much of the action would be rendered senseless without her. But Pope could mitigate her role considerably, extracting much of her dramatic vitality while allowing her to perform a structural function sufficient to keep the play formally intact. This appears to have been Pope's plan as he re-shaped *King John*, maintaining its basic outlines with a diminished but not obliterated Constance, as he urged the play more forcefully in the direction of what he saw as "correct" dramatic form.

Pope's notion of correct form comes even more sharply into focus when we consider his interpolations in the text of *King John*. These insertions are very slight indeed, consisting of only fifteen lines from *The Troublesome Raigne of John, King of England*, a play Pope believed to be the "first sketch" of *King John*, undertaken jointly by Shakespeare and William Rowley.<sup>14</sup> Pope defends his editorial adventuresomeness on the grounds that the Shakespearean text requires the inserted passages in order to make clear the "ground of the quarrel" (3:148) between the Bastard and the Duke of Austria. Here is the longest interpolation as Pope reprints it (slightly altered and rearranged by Pope from its original state in *The Troublesome Raigne*), right after the verbal exchange between the Bastard and Austria over the calf's skin at III.i.133:

*Aust.* Methinks that *Richard's* pride and *Richard's* fall  
Should be a precedent to fright you, Sir.

*Bast.* What words are these? how do my sinews shake!  
My father's foe clad in my father's spoil!  
How doth *Alecto* whisper in my ears;  
Delay not *Richard*, kill the villain strait,  
Disrobe him of the matchless monument,  
Thy father's triumph o'er the savages—  
Now by his soul I swear, my father's soul,  
Twice will I not review the morning's rise,  
'Till I have torn that trophy from thy back,  
And split thy heart, for wearing it so long.

(lines 1059ff.)

These lines are "bad" enough, of course, and it is difficult to imagine

<sup>14</sup> Pope, 3:148.

Pope inserting them out of anything but the grimmest editorial duty; but they clearly are not "bad" in the same way as the degraded utterances of Constance. In a useful, if highly selective, study of "Pope's taste in Shakespeare," John Butt takes up the question of editorial values as reflected in Pope's complete text. He notes Pope's fondness for the "descriptive" and "sententious" in his editorial marking of "shining passages," concluding with an observation that bears directly upon the issues I have been discussing:

These ["shining"] passages further exemplify Pope's fondness for the non-dramatic, for the static, one might even say, for the statuesque. It is as though he were underlining all in Shakespeare that a man bred in the neo-classic tradition of tragedy would be expected to admire.<sup>15</sup>

Butt's comments point interestingly to what might be called Pope's literary threshold of "badness." The Bastard's interpolated speech, with its decorous and bookish embroidery—heroic vaunt, noble revenge, shaking sinews, even the fatal whisper of Alecto—is just the right sort of badness for Pope's "taste." It is, so to speak, badness with form: Apollonian, sententious, learned, structurally integral, and thoroughly male.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Pope's Taste in Shakespeare* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1936), 12, 13.

<sup>16</sup> In this regard it is interesting to note that another heavily degraded character is Arthur, a character repeatedly referred to as "boy," and quite often seen in the company of women. Fifteen of his lines disappear from Pope's text, all during the melodramatic scene with Hubert (IV.i), where he is seen as the complete victim of political events. Dusinger discusses him briefly as an "archetypal 'feminine' figure" (49), and associates him in the play with the females who repeatedly embarrass men; for Dusinger Constance and Arthur are "both located deep in the heart of embarrassment" (48) both in the minds of the characters on stage and the spectators in the audience. Also noteworthy, as Dusinger and others have observed, is the stage tradition of casting young actresses in the role of Arthur from 1737 onward. See Dusinger (40); E. A. J. Honigmann, ed. *King John* (London: Methuen, 1959), lxxv; and L. A. Beaurline, ed. *King John* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990), 11–12. More extensive and detailed information on actresses who have played the role may be found in Harold Child, "The Stage-History of *King John*," in *King John*, ed. J. Dover Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1936), lxiv–lxxvii; *The London Stage 1660–1800*, part 3, vol. 2, ed. Arthur H. Scouten (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1961), *The London Stage 1660–1800*, part 4, vol. 1, ed. George Winchester Stone (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1962), *passim*.

Clearly Pope's textual manipulation of *King John* cannily reshapes the formal characteristics of Shakespeare's play, harmonizing it deftly in places with cherished eighteenth-century notions of literary decorum. Yet even Pope's frequent editorial intrusions, disruptive as they appear to be when considered in isolation rather than in the context of the play as a whole, still do not produce major thematic or structural dislocations of the sort that might severely threaten the formal integrity of Shakespeare's original. Indeed, Pope interferes less with the formal integrity of *King John* than most directors—Renaissance or otherwise—might be expected to do on any particular dramatic occasion. It is worth noting that for theatrical managers of the eighteenth century (and beyond) something roughly approximating Pope's text of *King John* pretty much formed the basis for acting versions of the play. Significant in this regard is the reissue of Pope's edition in 1734–36 in small and inexpensive copies of single plays expressly designed for sale in theatres and in rural districts, evidence both of the developing association of Pope's edition with the contemporary stage and of Shakespeare's burgeoning popularity all through the decade of the 1730s.<sup>17</sup> At a time when influential devotees of the theatre like the so-called Ladies of the Shakespeare Club helped revivify Shakespearean performance in an attempt to recapture the authentic energy of native English drama, acting versions of *King John*, clearly influenced in key places by Pope's edition, doggedly held the stage.<sup>18</sup> All productions of the play from its revival at Covent Garden in 1737 onward, for example, in one way or another either ameliorate or excise much of the scolding match between Elinor and Constance; and not until the mid-nineteenth century, in the productions of Phelps, Macready, and Kean, did the episode recover something of its original vituperative

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<sup>17</sup> See Jonathan Bate, *Shakespearean Constitutions: Politics, Theatre, Criticism 1730–1830* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 23–24.

<sup>18</sup> The fullest and most detailed discussion of those "ladies of quality" who did their best to promote Shakespearean performance in the first half of the eighteenth century is by Emmett L. Avery, "The Shakespeare Ladies Club," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 7 (1956): 153–58; see also Allardyce Nicoll, *The Garrick Stage: Theatres and Audience in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Sybil Rosenfeld (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1980), 15–19; and Nicoll, *A History of English Drama 1660–1900*, third edition, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1965), 2:68–69.



character. In addition, Pope's shortening of the first three acts generally typified (in one fashion or another) stage practice for over a century; and every mounting of the play from Garrick's in 1745 up to and including John Kemble's in 1791-92 even went so far as to retain Pope's interpolations from *The Troublesome Raigne*, thus allowing the Bastard's decorous "Alecto" speech to hold the boards for some seventy years after Pope introduced it into the play.<sup>19</sup>

Obviously Pope's "taste" in Shakespeare exerted no small force on the theatrical activity of his day. Just how much Pope was led in his critical judgement by contemporary stage practice or "the neo-classic tradition," or just how much he in turn may have led them is difficult to tell.<sup>20</sup> We do know, however, from Pope's preface to his edition that he valued the acting companies of his own day far more than those of Shakespeare's; for he makes no bones about where much of the blame resides for the numerous infelicities in Shakespeare's text. These he lays squarely at the feet of slovenly Elizabethan printers and uncouth Elizabethan actors. His final assessment of the latter may well be the most ultramontane pronouncement in his whole edition:

Having been forced to say so much of the Players, I think I ought in justice to remark, that the Judgement, as well as Condition, of that class of people was then far inferior to what it is in our days. As then the best Playhouses were Inns and Taverns (the *Globe*, the *Hope*, the *Red Bull*, the *Fortune*, &c.) so the top of the profession were then meer Players, not Gentlemen of the stage: They were led into the Buttery by the Steward, not plac'd at the Lord's table, or Lady's toilette: and consequently were intirely depriv'd of those advantages they now enjoy, in the familiar conversation of our Nobility, and an intimacy (not to say dear-ness) with people of the first condition. (1:xix)

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<sup>19</sup> For useful discussions of the stage history of *King John* in the eighteenth century and beyond see Child "The Stage-History of *King John*," lxxiii-lxxix; Beaurline, 1-23; Braunmuller, 79-93; Honigmann, lxxiii-lxxv; and George C. D. Odell, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), passim. See also, Sprague, *Shakespeare's Histories*, 12-28; and William Charles Macready's "*King John*," ed. Charles H. Shattuck (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1962), 1-75.

<sup>20</sup> Smith, 7-10, obliquely addresses this problem in his discussion of pervasive literary values of the age, particularly Dryden's. See also Child, "Shakespeare in the Theatre from the Restoration to the Present Time," 331-39.

Whether this sort of thing endeared Pope—and hence his textual practice—to contemporary dramatic companies we can never know. We do know that in a period when Shakespeare's plays were experiencing new dramatic life, certain striking features of Pope's edition found their way into dramatic scripts and stayed there for generations. And although many of these scripts took extreme liberties with their Shakespearean originals, we must avoid the temptation to see Pope's edition indiscriminatingly through their distorted light. For despite the marked changes Pope makes in his text of *King John*, an audience viewing a playscript based *meticulously* on his version (without further excisions or interpolations by actors) would no doubt leave the theatre with a sense of having experienced Shakespeare's play and not some mangled distortion of it, such as Colley Cibber's notorious adaptation, *Papal Tyranny in the Reign of King John* (1745).

But this audience might very well be aware also of certain palpable changes in the play's coloration and shape—changes that in throwing experienced playgoers slightly off their stride, would delicately but distinctly redirect their attention to just those passages whose formal integrity would now seem sharper for having been omitted or otherwise changed. Such a performance would have presented a somewhat foreshortened first half of the play, with rather more emphasis on "public" concerns such as war and politics than on "private" matters such as a mother's personal outrage and her expressive and excessive pain over a son's pathetic demise. And it is in the context of this private/public dimension that one of the most curious aspects of Pope's formal alteration of *King John* becomes apparent. As virtually all critics of Shakespeare's histories from Ernst H. Kantorowicz forward have observed, a key formal and structural basis for these plays is the ongoing tension between private and public values, specifically the ironic and often tragic energies released by the inevitable conflict between the body natural and the body politic.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, these very terms have become something of a critical commonplace in any treatment of the structural or ideological framework of Shakespeare's histories, particularly the great sequence from *Richard II* to *Henry V*, to which *King John* is

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<sup>21</sup> Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), 24–41.

sometimes considered a sort of thematic and structural prelude.<sup>22</sup>

Curiously enough, it is in *Richard II*, the history play that most scholars believe either comes just after *King John* or is roughly contemporaneous with it, that Pope again indulges in heavy degradation, in this case some one-hundred and sixty-five lines.<sup>23</sup> Gaunt's relentless punning on his own name and his ensuing repetitive word-match with Richard (II.i.75ff.), predictably, feel Pope's editorial knife. But it is in the now frequently praised speeches of Richard himself, in which the private/public duality is most thoroughly and tragically aired, that Pope goes on something of a degrading spree. Here, as in Constance's case, what Pope undoubtedly saw as idle punning and extravagant wordplay on the matter of private grief drops to the bottom of the page. Two of the most glaring instances of degradation will illustrate the point (quotations here are taken directly from Pope's edition, indicated by volume and page number):

Your cares set up, do not pluck my cares down,  
My care, is loss of care, by old care done;  
Your care, is gain of care, by new care won.  
The cares I give, I have, though given away;  
They tend the crown, yet still with me they stay.  
(3:161)

Is this the face, which fac'd so many follies,  
That was at last out-fac'd by *Bolingbroke*?  
A brittle glory shineth in the face,  
As brittle as the glory, is the face.... (3:164)

These and similar degradations of Richard's extravagant emotionalism (containing as they do expressions of personal grief strikingly

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<sup>22</sup> Virginia Mason Vaughan cogently takes up this question in "Between Tetralogies: *King John* as Transition," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 35 (1984): 407-20.

<sup>23</sup> The dating of *King John* is a highly problematic matter, but the consensus among scholars is to regard the play as perhaps a year earlier than *Richard II*, or about contemporaneous with it. See, for example, recent statements on the subject by G. Blakemore Evans, *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 50-51; Bevington, *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, 720; and Braunmuller, 2-15. But for a significant dissenting voice, see Beaurline, 194-210. Beaurline closely examines the play's relationship to *The Troublesome Raigne*, concluding that Shakespeare's play should be dated no later than 1590.

analogous to those of Constance in substance and temper) serve further to highlight Pope's (and inevitably Shakespeare's) formal preoccupations with the tension between private and public values in *King John*.

In the case of both *Richard II* and *King John*, dramatic form becomes finely but firmly reshaped by Pope's apparent queasiness over private emotion aired shamelessly in a decidedly public context; or, to use Dusiinberre's term once more, his apparent "embarrassment" over the shape each drama assumes when private, emotional, and essentially "female" forms of expression threaten to supplant more public, decorous, and "male" ones. Thus Pope's textual manipulation of *King John*, in altering subtly the formal energies of the play, ironically brings them into sharper view, distorting slightly the balance between private and public imperatives that Shakespeare relies upon so often to impose a tragic focus and structure upon the sprawling and frequently random events of chronicle-history. To what extent Pope's aesthetic and formal tampering with Shakespeare's text would have been immediately noticeable to an eighteenth-century audience at a performance of *King John* is difficult to tell. But the viewers of a hypothetical performance of Pope's reshaped play, whether they expressed it in like terms or not (indeed, whether they would even have been fully aware of it in performance or not), would have experienced a slightly more "masculine" version of Shakespeare's original, molded and refashioned by the poet/editor of the playbook to coincide more closely with his and his age's best notion of acceptable dramatic "form."





John P. Rumrich

## Shakespeare's Walking Plays: Image and Form in *1* and *2 Henry IV*

Let me begin by noting a couple of obvious formal characteristics of the middle plays in Shakespeare's second tetralogy: first, two plays, not one, concern the troubled reign of Henry IV; second, these two plays generally proceed by alternating two kinds of scenes—court and tavern. Past readings have quite rightly and unavoidably taken cognizance of these structural dualities—the twoness of their oneness, or vice versa—and, though less unanimously so, have seen the plays' emotional effect on audiences as similarly doubled over, particularly with respect to Hal's ascension to the throne and simultaneous rejection of Falstaff. Around mid-century, J. Dover Wilson and E. M. W. Tillyard, among others, convincingly argued that the two-part structure of *Henry IV* was purposeful and not simply opportunistic, though more recently the duality of the plays has been elaborated by most critics not so much in terms of the division into two parts as in terms of the alternation of scenes.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Salient excerpts of Wilson's and Tillyard's writings on the plays, along with the judgments of many others who will be cited hereafter, can be conveniently consulted in a collection edited by David Bevington, *Henry IV, Parts I and II: Critical Essays* (New York: Garland, 1986). For Wilson, see 117–38, and for Tillyard, 139–56.

Relatively little, however, has been said about the imagery of these plays. No one will begrudge Shakespeare the homage paid his inventiveness and skill as a shaper of scenes. Yet I believe that something fundamental goes wrong in the usual analysis of his art as a scenemaker. Furthermore, it is the sort of error that might not occur if critics attended more closely to the evocative idiom of the dramas. The general assumption among those who focus on court/tavern scenic juxtapositions is that the complex political and moral implications of Henry IV's embattled reign and Hal's rehabilitation demanded more representational options than Shakespeare had required in his previous histories. To accommodate these demands, he broke up the usual historical pomp and circumstance by shuffling in ironically marked, comic scenes and so dealt from a new deck.<sup>2</sup> But the causal priorities and teleology that such matter-and-form analysis assumes can be quite misleading. For one thing, the foreconceit implicitly attributed to Shakespeare in this reconstruction seems too specific for belief. Neither the story of the paternal usurper nor that of the pre-monarchical history of his heroic son had a very particular set of ethical or political views necessarily attached to it, and certainly not patently complementary ones, as if awaiting the invention of a dialectical format and the injection of a comic catalyst for their presentation. In the somewhat analogous case of certain Roman plays, Shakespeare produced discrete dramas lacking prominent subplots, yet his sources here, too, were multifarious and susceptible to group arrangement—the *Caesar* plays or an *Octaviad*, perhaps.<sup>3</sup>

Although the premise underlying my argument is certainly nothing new, it bears repeating: the dualism of moral or political

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<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare's creativity in finding these representational options is almost universally associated with Falstaff, and Falstaff with the world of comedy, from which Shakespeare drafted him so he could inject complex comic ironies into the harsher world of the histories. As C. L. Barber writes in *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*, "in creating the Falstaff comedy, he fused two main saturnalian traditions . . . and produced something unprecedented. He was working out attitudes towards chivalry, the state and crown in history" (Bevington, ed., *Essays*, 225).

<sup>3</sup> In arguing that the understanding of how Shakespeare made his plays has been too teleological, I have no intention of disputing that Shakespeare's view of history was teleological. On this point, and on the analogies between Shakespeare's Roman and English histories, see John Velz, "Cracking Strong Curbs Asunder: Roman Destiny and the Roman Hero in *Coriolanus*" *ELR* 13 (1983): 58–69.

meanings versus formal structures cannot be maintained. It is the persistent mind/body problem of literary studies, and on it attend the alienating and perplexing consequences that afflict any dualism. In the case of the *Henry IV* plays, analysis of scenic alternation has tended to be pre-determined by assumptions about the meaning of court and tavern. The critics in effect do what they assume Shakespeare did: decide what the plays are about—chivalry and justice or power and ideology, for example—and then define their forms according to that meaning. One might object that this complaint is more pertinent to old historicist analyses than to contemporary interpretations. In fact, recent anthropological, psychoanalytic, new historicist and even metadramatic readings of the plays mostly work from the same dichotomy of court and tavern and devise that dichotomy according to their own preconceptions—even when the dichotomy is explained as being more apparent than real, the consequence of a totalitarian strategy of “subversion and containment.” Shakespeare’s playmaking does not work neatly or symmetrically, nor should criticism cheat his meaning of its organic messiness, its lifelike mingling of significance and irresolvability. The present argument will, rather than stress the dichotomies of these plays or focus on echoing scenes, instead examine the images of the *Henry IV* plays as primary elements of their meaning and form.

## I

Take hede therefore that ye walke circumspectly, not as  
fooles but as wise, redeeming the time: for the days are evil.  
(*Ephesians* 5:15)<sup>4</sup>

One thing the *Henry IV* plays certainly do is cover the distance between *Richard II* and *Henry V*. Evidence at the end of *Richard II*, where Hotspur is already construed as the coeval of an insolent Hal,

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<sup>4</sup> *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1969). D. J. Palmer, who carefully untangles the web of biblical allusions in the *Henry IV* plays, glances at the ironic use of walking imagery in Henry IV’s vow to march “in the path of his Redeemer” (320). See “Casting off the Old Man: History and St. Paul in *Henry IV*,” in Bevington, ed., *Essays*, 315–36.



indicates that Shakespeare planned to dramatize the conflict between them. He may even have had *Henry V* in mind.<sup>5</sup> This possibility does not license interpretation by the simple measure of Hal's eventual reign; one of the great lessons of these plays is that the journey is more important than the destination, whatever we suppose the latter to be. In any case, the middle plays go, and regardless of how we conceive of the distance between *Richard II* and *Henry V*, an ambulatory quality radiates from their dominant strains of imagery—all of it concerned with human beings in motion over the realm of England.<sup>6</sup> Though ancillary images related to human beings in motion occur, especially those related to travel by horseback, the plays concentrate on walking—feet hitting the ground one at a time to get from one place to another or cover territory. Even structurally, something like the rhythm of walking—swinging from side to side in order to go straight—is felt in the alternation between court and tavern and in the sequence of parts one and two.

The imagery of walking begins in *Richard II* with Bolingbroke, whose exile is described as “an enforced pilgrimage,” a “sullen passage of . . . weary steps” and “tedious stride[s]” (I.iii.264–68). This is the first passage of Bolingbroke's that fails to go according to plan and it establishes the figure of ironic pilgrimage that shapes the journey of his “banish'd and forbidden legs”—along “by-paths and indirect crook'd ways”—to the throne and beyond (*Richard II* II.iii.90; 2 *Henry IV* IV.v.184). Once he “steps me a little higher than his vow” and seizes the crown, the crowds who had followed at his “admired heels” become cynical rebels “baying him at the heels” (1 *Henry IV* IV.iii.75; 2 *Henry IV* I.iii.105, 80). Eventually hounded to his death, he still conforms to the trope, having “walk'd the way of nature” (2 *Henry IV* V.ii.4). As Chaucer's Knight might comment, probably sympathetically, Henry continually finds himself keeping

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<sup>5</sup> Norman Rabkin argues, quite plausibly, that Shakespeare had the whole tetralogy in his sights as he was writing *Richard II* in 1595—four or five years before writing *Henry V*. See *Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 36.

<sup>6</sup> Velz, “Strong Curbs,” 60, persuasively argues that Shakespeare's characteristic concern in his histories, like Virgil's, is “Janus-like.” He is preoccupied with periods of transition, in which remnants of the past seem to jostle against intimations of the future as one era shifts into the next. Velz's case seems to me especially convincing in light of the sometimes violently transitional nature of Shakespeare's own time.

appointments that he never made, as well as making those he will never keep. Despite Richard's claim that Bolingbroke's "every stride" on English soil is "dangerous treason," the danger is to Richard himself, even according to his musing that his "subjects' feet" will, once he is dead and buried, "hourly trample on their sovereign's head" (III.iii.92-93, 156-57).

As these examples disclose, the image of walking inevitably involves the underlying ground of any notion of origin or destination—that which supports the walkers on their way—"this blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England" (*Richard II* II.i.50). England is simultaneously a "nurse" or "teeming womb" and a mass grave, whether a pit to be filled with peppered corpses, or a ground on which one may sit and "tell sad stories of the deaths of kings" (II.i.51; III.ii.156). Richard, despite his disdain for his native soil—"are we not high?" (III.ii.87)—can also speak appreciatively of what he sometimes reviles:

I weep for joy  
To stand upon my kingdom once again.  
Dear earth, I do salute thee with my hand,  
Though rebels wound thee with their horses' hoofs.

.....  
[Do] annoyance to the treacherous feet,  
Which with usurping steps do trample thee.

(III.ii.4-17)

Richard's encouragement of the earth as if it were an ally is supplemented by Carlisle's prophecy that when the legitimate king is uprooted and Henry crowned in his place,

The blood of English shall manure the ground,  
And future ages groan for this foul act.  
Peace shall go sleep with Turks and infidels,  
And in this seat of peace tumultuous wars  
Shall kin with kin and kind with kind confound.

(IV.i.138-42)

Richard's land, according to Carlisle, is set to become "the field of Golgotha" (IV.i.145), a killing field that will see an end to so noble a man as Hotspur, who "had no legs that practiced not his gait," "walk'd o'er perils, on an edge," but unlike Bolingbroke never

managed "to tread on Kings" (2 *Henry IV* II.iii.23, I.i.170; 1 *Henry IV* V.ii.85). As it turns out, Richard's belief that "this earth shall have a feeling, and *these stones / Prove armed soldiers*" is not merely a compounded Ovidian fancy (*Richard II* III.ii.24–25; my emphasis). His deposition and murder induce the prophesied birth of strife. And when we recall these plays' persistent identification of the earth as the mother and grave of soldiers—indeed the very substance of their beings—Richard's lament over wounds in the earth should call more than horseshoed hoofprints to our minds, especially at those astonishing moments when symbolic associations fuse with bloody reality: after Shrewsbury, for example, "many a nobleman lies stark and stiff / Under the hoofs of vaunting enemies" (1 *Henry IV* V.iii.41–42); and after Agincourt, "wounded steeds / Fret fetlock deep in gore . . . with wild rage / Yerk out their armed heels at their dead masters, / Killing them twice" (*Henry V* IV.vii.78–81).

The image of soldiers walking on the land of their origin and destination is often complemented by the image of horses in motion over it. Generally, travel by horse in Shakespeare implies easy mobility and enlarged freedom to follow one's own pursuits. Richard III famously offers his hard-won kingdom for a horse, and the audience believes him, for it knows that then he could at least escape alive and have the world again before him to bustle in. Uninhibited walking or running—being footloose and fancy-free—also implies freedom or escape from ordinary responsibility, as is apparent in Hal's questioning whether Francis will show his indenture "a fair pair of heels" (1 *Henry IV* II.iv.48). Soldiers' feet, however, should not be so apt to move, at least not in battle; speed and agility are more prized in cavalry.<sup>7</sup> Douglas, for example, "runs a' horseback up a hill perpendicular," but "afoot . . . will not budge a foot," until Shrewsbury, that is, when he retreats with his men on "the foot of fear" (II.iv.340–41, 350–51; V.v.20). As in the case of Douglas, talk of feet and horses often combines for purposes of characterization. Falstaff, for whom "eight yards of uneven ground is threescore and ten miles afoot" hates walking and at Gadshill, deprived of his horse, refuses to "rob a foot further" (II.ii.24–26, 21). When Hal procures

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<sup>7</sup> In the *History of Britain*, Milton speaks of "the nimble service of a Horse-man, and the stedfast duty of a Foot Souldier." See *Complete Prose Works*, ed. Don M. Wolfe, 8 vols. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1953–82), 5:48.



him "a charge of foot," he thus predictably wishes "it had been of horse" (III.iii.186-87). Hotspur's very name unites imagery of feet and horseback riding. Refusing to reply to his wife's questions, he yearns for his roan so that he can escape from her. The stereotypical depiction of wives as, in an etymologically literal sense, impediments—balls and chains, clogs, and so forth—lies close to the surface of this scene. Later, a similarly unresponsive Falstaff is threatened with precisely this more literal form of immobilization by the Lord Chief Justice: "To punish you by the heels would amend the attention of your ears" (2 *Henry IV* I.ii.122-23). As Lear's Fool observes, "horses are tied by the heads, dogs and bears by th' neck, monkeys by th' loins, and men by th' legs" (*King Lear* II.iv.7-10).

Hotspur's association of his horse with freedom aside, equestrian imagery suits a plot that turns on a contest for free and full sovereignty over a kingdom. Northumberland's description of civil insurrection as a riderless horse that "madly hath broke loose, / And bears down all before him" reflects the long philosophical tradition comparing horsemanship to government of either the individual or the state (2 *Henry IV* I.i.10-11). Wild horses give way to spent ones, however, when near the end of a scene fraught with accounts of horses ridden into the ground for rumor's sake, England is portrayed as a "bleeding land, / Gasping for life under great Bolingbroke" (2 *Henry IV* I.i.207-8). In the same vein, the Carrier's remarks explaining how the stable is "upside down since Robin ostler died" suggest the disorder following Richard's death and take on added resonance in the next scene, when Hal demands of the "uncoltd" Falstaff, who is desperately seeking a horse, "shall I be your ostler?" (1 *Henry IV* II.i.10-11; II.ii.37, 41). Reportedly, Queen Elizabeth also expressed herself within this figurative field, using the same metaphor that Pistol later employs in exhorting his friends: "Let us to France, like horse-leeches, my boys, / To suck, to suck, the very blood to suck!" (*Henry V* II.iii.54-55). According to William Camden, the queen applied the metaphor to describe corrupt customs officers, who "like horse leeches suck themselves fat upon the goods of the commonwealth."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> William Camden, *The History of the Most Renowned and Victorious Princess Elizabeth* . . . (London, 1688), 440. Pistol's decision not to cut his prisoner's throat arises from his characteristically parasitic motive: "as I suck blood, I will some mercy show" (*Henry V*



The association of horsemanship with government derives from Plato's famous comparison of the soul to a chariot drawn by winged horses, an allegory that by Shakespeare's time had been translated into terms of walking imagery.<sup>9</sup> As John Freccero has demonstrated, "the association of the feet of the body with the wings of the soul" was a commonplace of Christian Neoplatonism.<sup>10</sup> Shakespeare, as we have seen, mostly forsakes images of wings and flight in favor of feet and walking. For one thing, unlike Milton for example, he did not readily entertain so bizarre a notion as featherless bipeds unconnected to the earth, particularly not in these plays, where the land itself takes so prominent a symbolic role. Instead, he insistently relates horseback riders, like walkers, to the ground, as when Blunt appears "stain'd with the variation of each soil" over which his horses' hoofs have passed (*1 Henry IV* I.i.64), or when Richard speaks of horses' hoofs wounding his ground. The punitive translation of England into a war-torn, post-crucifixion Holy Land, however, involves more than Neoplatonic expression of divine-right typology. And it is precisely by virtue of walking imagery that the prime organizational metaphor of geographical substitution goes beyond the banality of Elizabethan (or contemporary) ideology to bear

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IV.iv.66). The king's ruthlessness in ordering prisoners' throats cut, aside from its strategic justification, almost seems high-minded by comparison, as, too, does his refusal to negotiate terms of ransom for himself.

<sup>9</sup> "The soul resembles the combined efficacy of winged steeds and a charioteer. . . . Of these horses he finds one generous and of generous breed, the other of opposite descent and opposite character. And thus it necessarily follows that driving . . . is no easy or agreeable work." Plato, *Phaedrus*, 246-47, trans. J. Wright, in *Five Dialogues of Plato Bearing on Poetic Inspiration*, ed. Ernest Rhys (London, 1910), 237. Although imagery of wings is in the *Henry IV* plays typically replaced by that of feet, wings do appear in the king's assessment of Hal and in a way that suggests the Neoplatonic background of the image: "thy affections . . . do hold a wing / Quite from the flight of all thy ancestors"; "O, with what wings shall his affections fly / Towards fronting peril and oppos'd decay!" (*1 Henry IV* III.ii.30-31; *2 Henry IV* IV.iv.65-66). For observations on the tradition of horsemanship as a symbol of rule and its relevance to the tetralogy, see Robert N. Watson, "Horsemanship in Shakespeare's Second Tetralogy" *ELR* 13 (1983): 274-300. Watson is particularly convincing in discussing Henry IV's usurpation of Richard's "roan Barbary" (see *Richard II* V.v.78).

<sup>10</sup> John Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 38. Eric Mallin of the University of Texas recommended this source to me.

dramatically on the complexity and concreteness of Elizabethan cultural practice.

In Shakespeare's time, and for centuries before and after, it was by "processioning," often and fittingly corrupted to "possessioning," that the extent and ownership of a community's land was marked. The official sermon for Rogationtide, based on the verses that serve as epigraph to this section, insisted on a lesson that Holinshed and Shakespeare's Carlisle echo: "God in his ire doth root up whole kingdoms for wrongs and oppressions; and doth translate kingdoms from one nation to another, for unrighteous dealing."<sup>11</sup> Annually, on the three days before Ascension Thursday, townspeople would proceed along the borders of their parish, inspecting them to insure that no one had encroached on community property, or contrived to enclose common wetland, forest, or pasture. Borders defined the community in many ways, not the least of them being for tax purposes and administration of poor laws. With these obvious and extensive practical implications, Rogationtide perambulation, or "beating the bounds," was a religious ritual in which participation was nearly unanimous and unusually spirited. At significant points along the way, children would have the vital communal knowledge pounded into them: "boys were . . . bent over marker stones and beaten, thrown into boundary ponds or clumps of nettles, or upended and 'bumped' where the borderline changed direction." Nor was this mnemonic reinforcement inflicted simply for the pleasure of abusing children. Men with axes and crowbars followed along to obliterate any false markers that had been erected in cunning attempts to steal land. Imprecatory verses from the law—"cursed be he that removeth his neighbor's landmark" (*Deut.* 27:17)—were pronounced by the parish priest.<sup>12</sup> Fights frequently broke out between processioners from neighboring villages when they met at disputed points. It was a religious holiday and community festival with its feet firmly on the ground of sacred property right, charged

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<sup>11</sup> *Sermons or Homilies Appointed to read in Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth of Famous Memory* (1604; repr. London, 1815), 342.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Kightly, *The Customs and Ceremonies of Britain* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 48. David Riggs of Stanford University, after reading an earlier draft of this essay, suggested that I investigate walking rituals, which led me to consider Rogationtide in relation to the tetralogy.

with the holy violence of marking territory. Hence, according to the *OED*, "walk" in Shakespeare's time could mean "a procession, ceremonial perambulation" (I.2.a) or a proprietary tract of land (II.10-12), as, for example, in the case of Caesar's "walks, / His private arbors, and new planted orchards" (*Caesar* III.ii.259-60). By extension, it could also apply to an area "within which a person is accustomed to practise his occupation without interference from a rival" (*OED* II.14).

At the very heart of *1 Henry IV*, immediately after the great tavern scene and before Hal's interview with his father, comes the rebels' negotiation of the division of the land. Although the moment tends to go unremarked in recent criticism of the play, its relevance to an audience experienced in processioning would have been considerable:

*Hotsp*: See how this river comes me cranking in,  
 And cuts me from the best of all my land  
 A huge half-moon, a monstrous cantle out.  
 I'll have the current in this place damm'd up,  
 And here the smug and silver Trent shall run  
 In a new channel, fair and evenly;  
 It shall not wind with such a deep indent,  
 To rob me of so rich a bottom here.

*Glend*: Not wind? It shall, it must! You see it doth.

*Mort*: Yea,

But mark how he bears his course, and runs me up  
 With like advantage on the other side,  
 Gelding the opposed continent as much  
 As on the other side it takes from you.

*Worc*: Yea, but a little charge will trench him here,  
 And on this north side win this cape of land;  
 And then he runs straight and even.

*Hotsp*: I'll have it so. A little charge will do it.

*Glend*: I'll not have it alt'red.

*Hotsp*: Will not you?

*Glend*: No, nor you shall not.

*Hotsp*: Who shall say me nay?

*Glend*: Why that will I.

*Hotsp*: Let me not understand you, then; speak it in  
 Welsh. (III.i.95-115)

If we can accept nothing as axiomatic about Shakespeare's politics, at least the probability is high that he considered division of the kingdom a bad thing. As an evil to be avoided it ranked with civil war and is closely linked to it. Although the rebels are here settling borders on a grand scale, their argument suggests certain similarities with what we know about Rogationtide, especially as their festival mood quickly shifts toward violent disputes over the dislocation of property markers. The border skirmishes of an alternative future—for Shakespeare's audience, an altered present—are here projected, and Gaunt's vision of England as a single kingdom, bounded by the sea "against the envy of less happier lands," yields to the prospect of a kingdom riven by self-interested rebels (*Richard II* I.i.49).<sup>13</sup> A successful Hotspur would not take long to erupt into battle with Glendower and the Welsh. For him, even "a kingdom . . . was too small a bound," at least according to the prince who defeats him, consigns him to "two paces of the vilest earth," and usurping his territorially aggressive spirit, goes on to trample France (*1 Henry IV* V.iv.90–91).

Richard, not Bolingbroke, initiates the unrighteous dealing that leads to this troublesome flux in established boundaries when he interferes with Bolingbroke's inheritance of his father's lands. J. H. Hexter has convincingly argued that Shakespeare forsakes the option provided by Holinshed—that of presenting Gaunt's son as a popular hero who overthrows a tyrant—to offer instead one "whose highest claim amounted to nothing more exalted than that he wanted his own property back."<sup>14</sup> Nor should we see this as a strategy for undercutting Henry IV's appeal; quite the reverse. The claim of liberation from tyranny would not automatically inspire trust or sympathy in an Elizabethan audience. But an audience accustomed to annual processioning to re-establish, by violence when possible, the boundaries of a community's inherited property could easily have identified with Henry's down-to-earth motives and even with his

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<sup>13</sup> Even those critics with no great love for the Lancastrians have noted that by comparison the rebels show a distinct lack of concern for the interests of England. For example, see W. H. Auden, "The Prince's Dog," (in Bevington, ed., *Essays*, 162).

<sup>14</sup> J. H. Hexter, "Property, Monopoly, and *Richard II*," in *Culture and Politics from Puritanism to the Enlightenment*, ed. Perez Zagorin (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1980), 12.



legalistic reasoning. Individual property rights stood on the same basis of time-honored custom and precedent as those of the community. These were in fact the state-prescribed principles for Elizabethan churchgoers' meditations as they walked their borders:

Our walks on these days [are] to consider the old ancient bounds and limits belonging to our township, and to other our neighbours bordering about us; to the intent that we should be content with our own, and not contentiously strive for other's, by any incroaching one upon another, or claiming one of the other, further than that, in ancient right and custom, our fore fathers have peacably laid out unto us for our commodity and comfort.<sup>15</sup>

Theoretically at least, not even the crown could interfere with the right to legitimately inherited property, and in the late sixteenth century this principle was being extended to include also "men's rights to hold what custom and their labor had made their own."<sup>16</sup> Hence common law was making it possible not only for copy-holders, but also for those in inherited occupations threatened by crown monopolies, to imagine themselves in Henry's shoes against the encroachments of a "skipping King" (*1 Henry IV* III.ii.60).<sup>17</sup> A threat to inherited land or to one's established walk of life went beyond a threat to wealth; it struck at one's historical sense of self, rather as the enclosure of common lands destroyed historical communities. The judicial defense of historical continuity also justified the inheritance of kingship, which means that in usurping Boling-

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<sup>15</sup> *Sermons*, 339-40.

<sup>16</sup> Hexter, "Property, Monopoly, and *Richard II*," 16. In his advocacy of Bolingbroke, Hexter does not attend to the inconsistency in Lancastrian claims to the thrones of France and England. While *Henry V* makes a great fuss, ironically or not, about England's rightful possession of France by inheritance, Henry V himself sits on the throne not by the "ancient right" stressed in the Rogationtide sermon but by the new legality of protecting his father's "labor" in stealing the crown. The inconsistency is plain and often remarked. The underlying irony is that the right of possession through the female line, by which Henry has legal claim to France, would set up "down-trod" Mortimer as the legitimate king of England (*1 Henry IV* I.iii.135).

<sup>17</sup> Hexter, 14-16.

broke's property, as various of his noble subjects repeatedly warn, Richard undoes himself.<sup>18</sup>

Imagery associated with walking is so common in the inherited ethical wisdom of our culture, especially its language of property and government, that we find it difficult to step back from it. Yet we can note that for Shakespeare, the figure of wise walking would have been inseparably associated with property rights and observance of boundaries over time, and would have been so at a time of momentous transition in these ideas, when notions of rights and boundaries were becoming less exclusively literal and so an integral part of a great revision of relations in and among communities. The very means by which changes in possession were prevented was itself changing, thereby testifying to the impossibility of rigidly maintaining the status quo. Walking thus would have had associations both with continuity, as a means of maintaining the possession of historical property and identity, and with change, in crossing borders or developing character. It is Hal's peculiar virtue in these plays to be able to balance the dialectic that walking implies, and he does so in part by carefully unfolding his own character. In any case, though battles over property had begun to be transferred to the courtroom, with its more abstract definitions of boundary, Rogationtide perambulation was still the practical norm and would long continue as such. Metaphors of boundary and of walking did and, moreover, still do express and influence the linked ideas of interest, identity, and possession.<sup>19</sup>

As we have seen, then, an Elizabethan audience would have been

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<sup>18</sup> Hexter, 19–22.

<sup>19</sup> On boundary metaphors and how they shape the modern western sense of self and community, see Jennifer Nedelsky, "Law, Boundaries, and the Bounded Self," *Representations* 30 (1990): 162–89. Her chief criticism of boundary metaphors in contemporary discourses concerning individual rights is that they tend to obscure the role of the community in guaranteeing those rights and thus foster an illusory sense of independent autonomy. One could argue in her terms that Hal is a prime example of modern selfhood simply by the fact that in establishing himself as king, he sets boundaries around himself that others (Falstaff in particular, but through him "all the world") must not violate—though of course these bounds depend on community cooperation. On the other hand, Rogationtide processioning seems a remarkably effective way of reminding citizens of the fact that observance of boundaries is something contingent on the will of the community.

trained and nurtured in these ideas through officially sanctioned and annually repeated interpretation of liturgical metaphor and accompanying festival rituals of great practical consequence. Educated auditors, furthermore, might also have registered them in the allegorical terms of Christian Neoplatonism. Aside from serving as the main text for the official Rogationtide sermon, *Ephesians* 5:15–16 is familiar as a source for the conclusion of Hal's pledge to redeem the time. A similar passage, perhaps even more directly relevant to Hal's famous soliloquy, comes from *Colossians*: "walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time" (4:5). Here Paul speaks of relations between Christians and non-Christians, and of the appropriate behavior of the former toward the latter. In Hal's case, however, the rubric "those that are without" applies to his idle companions, especially Falstaff, whom he will finally dispossess of his company by drawing and enforcing a distinct boundary around himself, charging the Chief Justice and others concerned to maintain the borders. That ethical self-possessioning—embodied in formal dramatic strategies suggested by walking imagery—is the ultimate concern of this essay.

## II

What man ordeineth, God altereth at his good will and pleasure, not giving place more to the prince, than to the poorest creature living, when he seeth his time to dispose of him this waie or that, as to his omnipotent power and divine providence seemeth expedient. The king had great regard of expedition and making speed for the safetie of his own person.<sup>20</sup>

Following the ironic historical pattern described by Holinshed in the first passage above, the *Henry IV* plays establish what it is that "seemeth expedient" to various characters. Then the playwright "at his good will and pleasure" thwarts them. By presenting characters

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<sup>20</sup> Raphael Holinshed, *The Historie of England*, 6 vols. (London, 1587; repr., London, 1808), 3:57.

who go against the current of history and are sacrificed to it, Shakespeare gives dramatic expression to the form and pressure of their time, at least as it seems to him expedient to present it. This dialectic of expedience, as I shall call it, is mediated through walking imagery. Before arriving at the ultimate subject of Hal's self-possessed rejection of Falstaff, therefore, we will consider how specific instances of walking imagery express—at the elemental level, as it were—the historical dialectic that shapes and structures the whole dramatic action.

As *1 Henry IV* opens, the new king ties together the various images discussed thus far in a long, rhetorical set speech, one which demonstrates that Shakespeare's mastery of this gambit did not end with *Richard III*. Because this remarkably meaningful speech will frequently be cited in what follows, I quote it in its entirety here:

So shaken as we are, so wan with care,  
Find we a time for frightened peace to pant,  
And breathe short-winded accents of new broils  
To be commenc'd in stronds afar remote.  
No more the thirsty entrance of this soil  
Shall daub her lips with her own children's blood;  
No more shall trenching war channel her fields,  
Nor bruise her flow'rets with the armed hoofs  
Of hostile paces. Those opposed eyes,  
Which like the meteors of a troubled heaven,  
All of one nature, of one substance bred,  
Did lately meet in the intestine shock  
And furious close of civil butchery,  
Shall now, in mutual well-beseeming ranks,  
March all one way and be no more oppos'd  
Against acquaintance, kindred, and allies.  
The edge of war, like an ill-sheathed knife,  
No more shall cut his master. Therefore, friends,  
As far as to the sepulcher of Christ—  
Whose soldier now, under whose blessed cross  
We are impressed and engag'd to fight—  
Forthwith a power of English shall we levy,  
Whose arms were molded in their mother's womb,  
To chase these pagans in those holy fields,  
Over whose acres walk'd those blessed feet



Which fourteen hundred years ago were nail'd  
 For our advantage on the bitter cross.  
 But this our purpose now is twelve month old,  
 And bootless 'tis to tell you we will go;  
 Therefore we meet not now. Then let me hear  
 Of you, my gentle cousin Westmorland,  
 What yesternight our council did decree  
 In forwarding this dear expedience. (I.i.1-33)

Despite Henry's intention to chase pagans in holy fields and so contradict the prophesied consequence of supplanting Richard, "frighted peace" will, as Carlisle had predicted, reside among "Turks and infidels," leaving England to the "furious close of civil butchery." Apart from its translated geography, Henry's long speech also recalls *Richard II* as it evokes the horrors of intestine war: maternal English soil drinking her own children's blood and being bruised by war horses' hoofs, kindred slaughtering each other. Even Richard's poetic fancy of the earth giving birth to soldiers is again validated in Henry's richly ambiguous attribution of "arms . . . molded in their mother's womb" to English infantry.<sup>21</sup> All this violence tears the land presumably because Henry's "treacherous feet" still "trample" the soil Richard forbade him, and over Richard's head lying beneath it.

In encouraging the sacrifice of Richard for the sake of his political interests, Henry has at best followed the wisdom of Pilate. The bald fact, which Shakespeare makes manifest but leaves unelaborated, is that Bolingbroke goes beyond his justifiable goal of regaining his inheritance and takes what belongs to Richard. That Richard brought his fall on himself does not change that fact, least of all in Henry's own eyes. His obsessively planned crusade is initially presented as restitution for his crime (*Richard II* V.vi.49-50). This time the profit of Henry's efforts is to go to Richard, or at least to Richard's

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<sup>21</sup> The earliest quartos and the first folio of course use no apostrophe for "mothers" in line 23, "Whose arms were molded in their mothers womb." Folio 4, which I follow, has "mother's." Bevington's text of the play, following Theobald's, has mothers', though it leaves "womb" in the singular. The Ovidian image of soldiers born from the earth, like so many others in the middle plays, is capped in *Henry V*: "good yeomen, / Whose limbs were made in England, show us here / The mettle of your pasture. Let us swear / That you are worth your breeding" (III.i.25-28).

prototype, whose feet "were nail'd / For our advantage on the bitter cross." The ambiguity of "our advantage," however, superimposes Henry's holy motivation on his secular one. Ostensibly, he refers to the benefit that accrued to all Christians from the crucifixion, but, given Richard's reincarnation of the sacrificed Christ, we may also think of the benefit that accrued uniquely to the newly minted royal we from Richard's death, and that he similarly hopes will accrue from a crusade on behalf of Christ. Henry dangles the prospect of a crusade to quiet his subjects, persuading them to "march all one way and be no more oppos'd," their giddy minds occupied with the death of infidels.

Coming at the end of line thirty-three, perhaps not coincidentally the speech's final line, the phrase "dear expedience" is usually glossed as signifying the haste with which arrangements for the king's expiatory crusade have been made. Bevington's note, for example, has "urgent expedition." But "dear expedience" is also something of a linguistic dwarf star, in which the form and figures of the *Henry IV* plays are densely packed. This density derives in part from the etymology of "expedience." *Expedire* primarily means to extricate, literally by freeing the feet (*ex ped-*, *pes*), and extends to making convenient arrangements or to anything advantageous. "Expedience" also is connected to *expeditus*, a fast-moving, lightly-armed footsoldier, which explains the meaning of "expedition," common in Shakespeare, as armed men in motion. In light of an etymology obvious to anyone with even small Latin, we can see how the symbolic reversal of Henry's sin should be accomplished. His crusade to the holy land will expiate by way of extrication his former crime, unnailing those blessed feet of Christ's / Richard's from the cross so that he can be free to walk the holy / Eng/land and say, in Richard's words upon returning from Ireland, "I weep for joy / To stand upon my kingdom once again" (*Richard II* III.ii.4-5).

Although the impossible reversal envisioned by the speech seems to amount only to an empty gesture, Henry, I think genuinely, does wish his own death. As many of his subjects—the "common dog"—eventually do, he seems to prefer Richard alive again at the expense of his own demise: "O earth, yield us that king again / And take thou this!" (2 *Henry IV* I.iii.97, 106-7). If this switch could come about, Carlisle's prophecy would be undone: war removed to the real holy land, peace returned to England, the rightful King in place,

and the usurper dead in exile. Certainly, Richard's presence shapes the rest of Henry's life, whether through various premonitions about Hal's resurrection of Richard's ways, or, metonymically through the death-dealing crown.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, Henry well knows that Richard himself cannot come back to life and, as is later made quite explicit, plans the crusade as an attempt to free nobody's feet but his own (2 *Henry IV* IV.v.209-12). The only pagans he chases, after all, are those of his countrymen who refuse to accept his right to the throne. Such an expedition, as Hal later puts it, entails much "waste in brief mortality" (*Henry V* I.ii.28), and the waste of "friends," whose "stings and teeth" threaten the king, comprises a good part of "our advantage" (2 *Henry IV* IV.v.204-5). Henry's intentions for his "friends" are darkly reflected in Falstaff's for his ragged footsoldiers. Their amputation from the body politic will boost its economic health, thus fostering domestic tranquility, and he will profit from arranging that they rather than others fill a pit.<sup>23</sup> Despite Henry's latent bad conscience, then, which will eventually work its way to the surface, his manifest sense of expedience illustrates what Nietzsche describes as the instinct for freedom: "every animal . . . instinctively strives for an optimum of favorable conditions under which it can expend all its strength and achieve its maximal feeling of power."<sup>24</sup> Compulsive talking about a crusade to the Holy Land need not register as "bootless," if it keeps the court preoccupied and assuages Henry's own guilt and fear, allowing him to fight rebellion.

The king's speech thus introduces the prevailing dialectical pattern of these plays, the way they shift from side to side to go forward, and it manages this introduction also on a rhetorical level. After the king has voiced at length his aspiration for a crusade, he dismisses what he has said as "bootless." We are left to wonder at

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<sup>22</sup> Shakespeare does not explicitly use Holinshed's report that the rebellions against Henry were generally accompanied by sightings of Richard alive. See, for example, the marginal note in *The Historie of England*: "King Richard once againe alive" (Holinshed, 3:29).

<sup>23</sup> The ironic wartime connections between Henry and Falstaff continue in 2 *Henry IV* when the rebels, without a fight, agree to "stoop tamely to the foot of majesty" and Falstaff bluffs Coleville into surrender, anticipating that the event will be immortalized as "Coleville kissing [his] foot" (IV.ii.42; IV.iii.48).

<sup>24</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1969), 107.



the apparent uselessness of all that has been said. By this very strategy of misdirection—the fullness of and engagement with what is “bootless”—these plays unfold character and define the direction of history. They also thereby manage to render what is being sacrificed in the move forward, whether that sacrifice be regarded as the legitimacy of the monarchy, Hotspur's intrepid valor and honor, or Falstaff's ingratiating wit. And what these plays leave behind is immediately regarded under the aspect of nostalgia, with backlight and gauze over the lens. By probing the pun on “boot”—even though it does not in fact affect Henry's speech—we can gain a more concrete understanding of how this dialectic works.

Although “bootless” in the sense of “absence of footwear” plays no part in Henry's speech and is almost unheard of elsewhere in Shakespeare, puns on boot as profit/footwear occur often enough in these plays that they almost seem to intrude even when uninvited. For example, Falstaff jabs at Poins for wearing “his boots very smooth, like unto the sign of the Leg” (2 *Henry IV* II.iv.246–47). Though perfectly straightforward, the line at first sounds infected with the double sense. Conversely, in *Henry V*, the priests' comparison of soldiers to bees, who “make boot upon the summer's velvet buds,” while engaged with both meanings, sets one wondering if this instance would even be noticeable elsewhere (I.ii.194). As king, ruthlessly just Henry V refuses robbers “smooth boots,” but in 1 *Henry IV* the possibility appears open that Hal's thieving companions, their boots “liquor'd” by his compromised justice, could in effect “walk invisible” as they rob pilgrims of crowns (II.i.86–88). In initiating the pun on “boot,” Gadshill ties the word into the complex of imagery we have already examined, explaining that he and his fellow thieves—“no foot land-rakers”—will “ride up and down on [the commonwealth], and make her their boots” (II.i.74, 82–83). Soon thereafter Hotspur adapts “bootless” to the Gadshill wordplay as he responds to Glendower's boast that he sent Bolingbroke “bootless home”: “Home without boots, and in foul weather too! / How scapes he agues?” (III.i.64–65).

1 and 2 *Henry IV* are inhabited by characters obsessed with “boot” both in the sense of profit or expedience and in the sense of protection for their aggressive self-interest, regardless of what boundaries they trespass. But the dramatic action repeatedly denies them



their profit and distributes instead disappointment and loss. Their supposed "boot" is finally revealed to be no more substantial than that on the sign of the leg. The pun on "boot," though confined mainly to the low plot, italicizes the sense of disappointment and disillusionment that in these plays inevitably attends what characters think will be expedient. Hence the key instance of the ambiguity of "boot," and the setup for the plays' consummate disillusionment, occurs near the end of *2 Henry IV*. Falstaff responds to news of Henry IV's death by repeatedly shouting the much punned-upon term: "Boot, boot, Master Shallow. . . . Let us take any man's horses; the laws of England are at my commandment" (*2 Henry IV* V.iii.131, 136-38). By "boot, boot," Falstaff may mean nothing more than "get on your shoes," but we hear more. His cries recall Gadshill and again invoke the now familiar constellation of boot, horse, and disregard of property and law.<sup>25</sup> Yet even in the Gadshill confusion over "boot," Hal's ulterior motive for participation in the robbery was the exposure of Falstaff, a process with which the victim seemed almost willing to comply, as if orchestrated scenes of public humiliation—not preferment—were the real reward of his relationship with the prince. Such ironic coincidence of opposites displays the dialectical form of Shakespeare's dramatic design, most notoriously in Falstaff's case, but also in the progress of almost every character except Hal. By the conclusion of Falstaff's first humiliation, the prince, acting the part of king, says he will banish plump Jack, even if it means banishing all the world. On this later occasion, then, Falstaff's excited command to, and expectation of, "boot" leaves us with the uncomfortable feeling of waiting for the other foot to drop.<sup>26</sup>

Though it may seem merely clever to speak of Falstaff's second banishment as the other foot dropping, the idiom applies rather

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<sup>25</sup> Falstaff's cries of "boot" may even hearken back to York's repeated cries for his boots as he hastens to tell the newly crowned Henry IV of Aumerle's treachery, despite the fact that Aumerle is, in the play at least, his own son (*Richard II* V.ii.77, 84, 87). Obviously, in terms of the dichotomy of interest versus justice, York is the opposite of Falstaff.

<sup>26</sup> A final irony will occur when Hal himself succeeds in making France his "boots." It is perhaps what Branch Rickey called the "residue of design" that the historical record dates his great victory as coming on the feast of Crispin and Crispian, patron saints of shoemakers.

precisely to what happens repeatedly in *2 Henry IV*. Others have detailed the way in which most scenes in the second part recall in a darker and diminished fashion scenes from the first, and the growing sense of increasingly weary and anxious waiting. The feeling aroused is that of the past closing in and determining the shape of the present. We feel the harsh fall of that other foot early, as Northumberland reacts to news that the son he forsook has been slain by the prince and later, as Lady Percy upbraids her father-in-law and laments the loss of her husband, who had been the greatest man in the realm. By the time we get to part two, the choices have all been made it seems; what is left is the aftermath.

If nothing else, *2 Henry IV*, even in its title, mercilessly exposes the lie of the fresh start. One does not require the allegorization of the feet as the wings of the soul to understand that the act of walking can be taken as, in Freccero's terms, "quite literally the incarnation of the act of choice, for walking was simply choosing brought down to the material plane." Choices are made: one road is taken, another not. It is terrifyingly simple. Yet, this natural symbol had also been more arcanelly elaborated in terms of faculty psychology: "thoughts and desires produced by the intellect and will are reproduced, in the act of walking, by the succession of right and left."<sup>27</sup> The traditional interpretation of feet as embodying the spiritual components of choice, Freccero tells us, had indeed been so well established in theological vocabulary that the wounds in Christ's feet were often allegorized as the ignorance and concupiscence associated with original sin.<sup>28</sup> This returns us to the king's long opening speech and its prominent images of Christ's feet first walking over the holy land and then being nailed to the cross for "our advantage." In the *Henry IV* plays, characters' past concupiscence—ignorantly conceived as "expedience"—costs them dearly and eventually renders

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<sup>27</sup> Freccero, *Poetics of Conversion*, 42.

<sup>28</sup> Freccero, 44. Fulke Greville exemplifies the use of metaphors involving travel by foot to convey the linkage of reason and will: "[Henry the Third's] favourites, . . . were let loose to run over all the branches of his kingdom, misleading governors, nobility and people from the steady and mutual rest of laws, customs and other ancient wisdoms of government into the wildernesses of ignorance and violence of will" (emphasis mine). See *A Dedication to Sir Philip Sidney*, in *The Prose Works of Fulke Greville*, Lord Brooke, ed. John Gouws (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), 107.

them volitionally immobile. They are nailed to the cross of their past "mistreadings" (*1 Henry IV* III.ii.11).

Our first glimpse of Northumberland in part two accordingly shows him supporting himself with a staff, and though he throws it away and promises to fight this time, he is soon persuaded again to inaction by reason of his former inaction (I.i; II.iii). Our first sight of Falstaff, who has never willingly borne too far his "own flesh . . . afoot," similarly reveals him now halting—from the gout or the pox (*1 Henry IV* II.ii.34–35; *2 Henry IV* I.ii.243–44). Soon thereafter the aptly named Snare is set upon him for the repayment of past debts (II.i). But Henry IV suffers most for the past, finding himself impeded by what earlier he accused Mowbray of suffering—"the clogging burthen of a guilty soul" (*Richard II* I.iii.200). In his first speech of part two, the king restlessly laments the burden of the crown (III.i.4–31).<sup>29</sup> For some these protestations are hypocritical, but from that point on—though present for two more full scenes totalling more than 370 lines—Henry never walks on stage again but appears either carried in a chair or bedridden (*2 Henry IV* IV.iv; IV.v). According to Stow, to whom Shakespeare is more indebted than is generally recognized, "he was diseased and might not go."<sup>30</sup> And in Shakespeare's depiction, part of his "disease" is that still he plans obsessively, futilely, even ridiculously, his crusade. For Jerusalem means death to Henry and to Jerusalem—"by [his] scepter, and [his] soul to boot"—he desperately would go (*1 Henry IV* III.ii.97). An usurper who believes in legitimacy, he is eager for an expiatory death. From a vortex of repetition, Henry calls himself to his end, and does so with a compulsive sense of fate.<sup>31</sup>

From the classical perspective if not the Freudian, Henry's fearful and often repeated premonitions that Hal will in one way or another be "the rod of heaven, / To punish [his] mistreadings,"

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<sup>29</sup> Holinshed says Henry cannot sleep because, hated by both courtiers and commons, he fears assassination (3:18–19). In Shakespeare, he cannot sleep for the same reason that he wishes he were in Jerusalem, i.e., dead. He possesses the crown and is thus his own assassin.

<sup>30</sup> John Stow, *The Annales of England* (London, 1592), 543.

<sup>31</sup> The dialectic of expedience can be understood in Freudian terms as the working out of *thanatos* through the efforts of *eros*. For Freud the compulsion to repeat (*Wiederholungszwang*) signals the death drive.



though incorrect, is an excellent guess (*1 Henry IV* III.ii.10–11). Hal has been or will be at the heart of every other character's disappointment in the desire for boot, and he is Henry's main symbol of the reversal he at once fears and desires—his own death and Richard's resurrection.

This is what makes the episode of Hal's removing the crown crucial. In the rush to reveal Hal as a villain, recent criticism has tended to focus on the differences between what the prince really says to the crown when he takes it from his apparently dead father, and what he says he said. But leaving aside Hal's "damnable iteration," the more intriguing doubleness of this scene is the way it conflates Gadshill and Shrewsbury by pivoting on the theft of a crown from an apparently dead man (*1 Henry IV* I.ii.89). Although Richard—like Hotspur but unlike Falstaff—cannot return from death, Henry does, and when he does, Hal actually manages to perform Henry's impossible wish, returning the crown to the resurrected king, even though that means performing yet once more the "double labor," despised by Falstaff, of paying back what has been stolen (*1 Henry IV* III.iii.179–80). "Thy wish was father . . . to that thought," says Henry of Hal's supposing him dead (*2 Henry IV* IV.v.92). But that wish for Henry belongs to Henry himself, and his son is only its external representative.<sup>32</sup> Hal's theft and restoration of his crown gracefully undoes the king's crime in his heir, rendering their dynasty legitimate, for the time being.

### III

His noble hand  
Did win what he did spend, and spent not that  
Which his triumphant father's hand had won.  
His hands were guilty of no kindred blood,

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<sup>32</sup> "Fate compulsion" (*Schicksalszwang*) is, again, Freudian terminology, signalling behavior in which one's fate, though conceived of as external necessity, is actually arranged by oneself. See *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in the *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey et al., 24 vols. (London: Hogarth, 1953–74), 18:21.



But bloody with the enemies of his kin.

(*Richard II* II.i.179–83)

Before his death, the king shows himself particularly acute in apprehending an alternative future in which Hal would kill his brothers, or they him—an unspoken fear but one nonetheless discernible in his advice to Thomas of Clarence (*2 Henry IV* IV.iv.19–48).<sup>33</sup> Nor can Hal's reassurances after his father's death be heard without menacing recollections of the ironic geography of these plays: "This is the English, not the Turkish court; / Not Amurath an Amurath succeeds, / But Harry Harry" (*2 Henry IV* V.ii.47–49).<sup>34</sup> If these were plays driven only by nemesis along a high hellenic plotline, the bloody succession Henry dare not name would be entirely apt and unavoidable. Of the various possible futures envisioned in these plays—a divided kingdom with Hotspur the main man, a return of Richard's lawless irresponsibility, and so on—it is the darkest. If, as Auden claimed, the poignancy of Christian as opposed to Greek tragedy resides in the awareness that things could have happened otherwise, then so certainly must part of the thrill of those brief moments of success that the Christian view of history allows. An underappreciated part of Shakespeare's genius in these plays is to have found so many ways to suggest how different, and, at least from his audience's point of view, how much worse, things could have been. *2 Henry IV* thus doggedly pursues the deterministic

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<sup>33</sup> A fear of conflict between Hal and his brother Thomas is expressed in Stow's account of Henry's dying advice to his son (545). That in the drama Henry advises Thomas, not Hal, on this matter and deems him a peacemaker between the brothers is not so pertinent as the fact that Stow has Henry fearing another usurpation of the crown, this time from within the family. On Shakespeare's use of the crucial metaphor of fraternal strife and reconciliation as a means of encoding genre, see Marsha S. Robinson, "Mythoi of Brotherhood: Generic Emplotment in *Henry V*," elsewhere in this volume.

<sup>34</sup> Hal's mention of Amurath and the tenor of the king's advice to Thomas have been remarked in Robert N. Watson's psychoanalytic reading, "The Henry IV Plays," (in Bevington, ed., *Essays*, 387–422). After discussing the Oedipal conflict between Hal and his father, Watson raises the fratricidal possibilities of the next generation (413–15). Hal and the plays must work out a way to short-circuit the pattern set by Henry IV's usurpation: "Shakespeare and Hal virtually conspire to find an escape from the vicious cycle of Oedipal justice"; Hal finds "a plausible way . . . to fulfill his role as the nemesis generated by Henry's violations, without incurring a similar nemesis of his own" (417).

plotline, and has both Harrys adumbrate it, so that Hal's redemption of time from an otherwise automatic and inexorable cycle of sin and punishment will seem all the more remarkable, even miraculous. Perhaps the moral prerequisite for this respite is that Henry IV's repentance is more genuine than not. His fears for England finally and distinctly go past mere self-interestedness and so escape the cruel dialectic of boot. We know, and Shakespeare reminds us, that the dark version of the future will take hold soon enough after Henry V's death. But Hal is not merely a delay; he is a signpost to the future. He is a kind of destiny.

Though it is no longer fashionable to think so, Henry V is undoubtedly conceived as a hero who manages if not to break, then to interrupt and point beyond the bloody cycle begun by Richard, and he does so in part by banishing from his government Falstaff, who among other things represents the temptation for Hal to become another Richard and who also champions the riot that would necessarily have, in an unredeemed world, succeeded Henry IV. This also means, as many have lamented, that he thereby banishes Shakespeare's representative of the capacity to see the world under the aspect of alterity, a capacity that, if generally underappreciated in the *Henry IV* plays, has been effusively celebrated in this single character. Falstaff is a kind of chaos. As an endless stream of commentators can testify, jumbled elements of the past and future characterize him—medieval vice, decayed nobility, hypocritical puritan, and so on. He is the equivalent in Shakespearian political history of those confused paradigms that in transitional moments of the history of science are supposed to precede the establishment of a new discipline. Unfortunately for Falstaff, in becoming king, Hal must sort out the confusion, must establish the way things will be for him and for England.<sup>35</sup> Of all Shakespeare's great modern critics, only Empson,

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<sup>35</sup> Various critics have noted the sense of narrowing possibilities that accompanies Hal's progress toward the throne and have particularly criticized him for losing so much of himself in becoming King. See, for example, Jonas Barish, "The Turning Away of Prince Hal," (Bevington, ed., 277–88). It is impossible to deny the facts of such observations. Unlike Barish and others, however, I would deny that we are shown the "dehumanization" of Prince Hal (285). Quite the contrary. The process he undergoes is inevitable—for every living thing in time—and is the basis of human meaning. It does not strike me as very damning to note that, in effect, Hal is not Peter Pan.

whose appreciation of Falstaff was profound, has had the pragmatic wits and clear-sightedness to recognize this: "Hal deserved his moment of triumph because he had shown the right way [i.e., toward a "gradual unification of his own islands"] or at any rate seen things in their right proportions, before his time. That is the 'religious' or 'patriotic' feeling about Hal (one can hardly say which), and I feel it myself; it is a real enough thing."<sup>36</sup> Crucial to a fair assessment of Hal and of Falstaff is the realization that none of the alternative futures hinted at would have been felt as preferable to the present lived by Shakespeare's audience and to which Hal pointed. The heroism he represents is the establishment of a united England out of the possible worlds that lie before him, one that will survive if only as a vision, and yes, an ideology, for the future. Desire for unity should not, however, be reduced merely to ideological posturing or Tudor propaganda, though of course it also serves these purposes. "It is a real enough thing," as Empson says, and in the political world "real" things can be used to liberate or oppress. My point is that in becoming a heroic symbol of unity Henry V is not reduced to a creature of ideology; he, too, is real enough. Granted, the future that Henry V represents is also shot through with aggressive violence and a kind of piety that sounds like hypocrisy. As Nietzsche observed, the outbreak of the "classical ideal" of nobility in the millenia of Christianity is an uncanny and confusing phenomenon.<sup>37</sup> But Hal is an example of it. We taste nothing purely, and though Hal is one of the noblest humans Shakespeare invented, he is still human.

All who are sacrificed in the *Henriad* en route to Hal's glorious moment on the throne—including Richard II, Henry IV, and Hotspur—are summed up in the rejection of Falstaff. Nor can the igno-

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<sup>36</sup> William Empson, *Essays on Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 63.

<sup>37</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, 53–54. Henry V is often scorned for attacking France under the cover of a trumped up claim to that land. It was, however, a reasonable claim that many Elizabethans took as matter of fact. See, for example, Fulke Greville's *Dedication to Sir Philip Sidney*, where various French cities are cited as "part of [Elizabeth's] ancient domains lineally descended from many ancestors" (56). Fulke Greville also mentions Henry IV as a monarch who remedied "all unjust combinations or encroachments" (63). It can easily be argued that Henry V's claim to France was better than his claim to England.



rance and concupiscence that in one way or another afflict them all be indulged if Henry V is to succeed in becoming the first national, and insistently native-speaking, king of England instead of a "bastard Norman" (*Henry V* III.v.10).<sup>38</sup> In spite of the complexity and variety of Falstaff's character, his function in the plot is therefore quite simple, as many have observed—to be sacrificed so that Hal can achieve heroic stature. His secular martyrdom is ironically emphasized by the non-identification of him with Oldcastle, the continual parodies of religious language and attitudes in which he delights, and the descriptions of him "sweat[ing] to death" on Gadshill, "lard[ing] the lean earth as he walks along" (*1 Henry IV* II.ii.107–8). Although he may be compared to them, Falstaff is not quite Christ, Socrates, or any of the other martyrs with whom he has been identified.<sup>39</sup> Listing examples of Falstaff's ignoble viciousness has never quieted the enthusiasm of his advocates, however, even though the list includes leading "ragamuffins," unable to bribe their way free, to where they can be quickly "pepper'd," or mutilating a corpse for personal gain (*1 Henry IV* V.iii.35–36). Nor has it helped to present evidence of a dramatic design that insistently unveils the increasing ugliness of what had originally seemed good-natured, inept troublemaking and appealing disrespect for authority. Doll's arrest for helping Pistol beat a man to death occurs abruptly before the banishment scene. It comes there for a reason, as does Falstaff's promise to Pistol immediately prior to his banishment: "I will deliver her" (*2 Henry IV* V.v.39).

It would be foolish to go to the other extreme and deny the genius or immense appeal of Falstaff, not only "witty in [him]self, but the cause that wit is in other men" (*2 Henry IV* I.ii.9–10). Yet scholars have tended to blow up that second clause into an allegorical reading of Falstaff as a harmless and somehow sacred spirit of comedy. But if he is the embodiment of wit, it should be remembered that in these plays wit usually means verbal aggression, and he embodies both sides: its dazzling thrust and fluidity, and, as that

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<sup>38</sup> On Henry's use of English and the probable sensitivity of Shakespeare's audience to having been conquered and ruled by the French, see Empson, *Essays*, 59–62.

<sup>39</sup> Auden's essay (see note 13 above) is a classic example of this identification in its portrayal of Falstaff as Christian charity made flesh and of Hal as the devil—"the Prince of this world" (176–80).



second clause insists, its target: "man is not able to invent any thing that intends to laughter more than I invent or is invented on me" (2 *Henry IV* I.ii.7-9). Falstaff excels both at striking and at being the target. Indeed, the best scene in the tetralogy, one of the great scenes in all of Shakespeare, is the tavern scene after Gadshill. It has the pace and rhythm of a swordfight out of an epic swashbuckler—and not the "fencing grace" of some later skirmishes "tap for tap, and so part fair" (2 *Henry IV* II.i.190-91). In escalating rounds Falstaff is apparently caught, then loose; on the palpable verge of being skewered, then suddenly free—slipping his opponents' lunges and wheeling into the next clash. If he is a quasi-allegorical representative of anything, it is of expedience as extrication, of inventing a way out so that he can strike as well as play the target again. No one better prolongs the time or manages the tension before the other foot drops. But as his attitude toward Justice Shallow makes explicit, the game of wit he plays is like a food chain: "If the young dace be a bait for the old pike, I see no reason in the law of nature but I may snap at him" (2 *Henry IV* III.ii.330-31). Compunction and sympathy for others occur to him, but never influence his behavior. Nor is there any doubt that this fat Proteus exploits his incredibly flexible wit so that he might one day gain huge advantage by abusing his supposed friendship with Hal. But heroes must master Proteus, not be mastered by him, if they are to succeed.

Yes, Hal is heroic. Shakespeare clearly portrays him that way and, as prince and king, he has been so received by centuries of audiences who nevertheless were most entertained by Falstaff. This rather straightforward and lifelike instance of ambiguity and ambivalence has been increasingly difficult for our most subtle critics to accommodate. Instead, the tendency to become sentimental over Falstaff has been complemented by the denigration of Hal. Stephen Greenblatt, most notably, for whom the prince is Kurtz-by-the-Thames, breaks briefly from his grim and contemptuous account of Hal as a "conniving hypocrite" and "juggler," to savor in Falstaff the "irresistible embodiment" of, strange though it may sound, that which is "quintessentially" Shakespearean—the ability to awaken "a dream of superabundance."<sup>40</sup> On the contrary, if Falstaff may be

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<sup>40</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, "Invisible Bullets," *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Berkeley,

said to embody any one thing, it is what Simone de Beauvoir called "immanence," the acceptance of things as they are, a willingness to rest content in the pastness of the status quo.<sup>41</sup> Falstaff is aggressively immanent and would perpetuate the past order, or in this case disorder, by manipulating others, at any cost to them, so that he can continue as he was at least in his own eyes—the favorite whose excesses the prince indulged. As Empson remarks, Falstaff is the first joke against the class system, "a picture of how badly you can behave and still get away with it, if you are a gentleman."<sup>42</sup> The history of Richard II demonstrated that while a gentleman may be able to behave this badly, the king cannot, especially a king with brothers like Hal's.

The many and varied excellences of "the nimble-footed madcap Prince of Wales" are for our purposes rather neatly summed up just prior to the battle at Shrewsbury:

I saw young Harry, with his beaver on,  
His cushes on his thighs, gallantly arm'd  
Rise from the ground like feathered Mercury,  
And vaulted with such ease into his seat  
As if an angel dropp'd down from the clouds  
To turn and wind a fiery Pegasus,  
And witch the world with noble horsemanship.  
(IV.i.95, 104–10)

Here, at the crucial moment, the displaced wings of the soul return

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1988), 41, 62, 42. It is not possible here to deal at length with Greenblatt's famous essay on the tetralogy and its incarnation of contemporary suspicions regarding political power. Nor is it necessary to do so. He admits in effect that the plays cannot be performed as he interprets them, an impossibility that he construes as validation of his general thesis of subversion and containment. What is more, the moral standard by which he measures Hal he admits to be historically inappropriate for Shakespeare's time, and the better world in which more of his essay's readings would seem apt rather than contorted is "deferred" until some unknown future (62–63). The implication is that a reader who does not share in the disapproval of Hal is a dupe or evil, though that category seems to include all of Shakespeare's audiences, past, present, and foreseeable future. It is an insight worthy of Jonathan Swift, though it is made without humor.

<sup>41</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (New York: Knopf, 1952), xxxiv.

<sup>42</sup> Empson, *Essays*, 46.

with a vengeance, appearing not only on a winged horse but also on an angelic Hal's Mercury-like feet. The passage is an extraordinarily powerful one and has been repeatedly quoted as moving lyrical testimony to the prince's virtues, quoted even by scholars harshly critical of Henry V. What has not been noticed is how articulately it exploits the system of imagery that Shakespeare has built. The comparison of Hal to wing-footed Mercury taming Pegasus is particularly apt, bringing to mind heroes like Perseus and Bellerophon and of course the messenger god himself. The god of crossroads and borders, Mercury sponsors eloquence and oratory, travel and thievery—all activities with some bearing on Hal's character. Eschatologically, he was supposed to guide souls to their final resting-places, a function that Hal fills first in his generous tribute to the defeated Hotspur and later by virtue of his role as a warrior-king leading troops into battle. Henry V may argue that "every subject's soul is his own," but he never disputes that many meet their souls' destinies in following the king (*Henry V* IV.i.176).<sup>43</sup>

Primarily, though, Mercury is best remembered for mediating the destiny of heroes in epic literature, a kind of destiny that usually requires terrible sacrifice. Although in the passage above the myths of Perseus and Bellerophon are glanced at, the more tempting analogues are those concerning Hector and Achilles, Calypso and Odysseus, and Aeneas and Dido. In each case, Mercury persuades one of the parties to give up someone, in Achilles' case, Hector's corpse, so that the hero can fulfill his destiny and Jupiter's will can be accomplished. Falstaff himself enunciates the by-now-familiar principle that requires the Mercury-like Hal to establish a boundary that will exclude the fat knight: "It is certain that either wise bearing or ignorant carriage is caught, as men take diseases, one of another. Therefore let men take heed of their company" (2 *Henry IV* V.i.73–76). The rejection of Falstaff clearly represents the decisive step in Hal's becoming the great English hero. Clearly, also, the absence of

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<sup>43</sup> By virtue of uniting solar and lunar principles, Mercury is also the god associated with alchemy, and, in the Renaissance, with monarchy because of his role as the intermediary between gods and men and association with concord. Spenser identifies Elizabeth with Mercury. See Douglas Brooks-Davies, *The Mercurian Monarch: Magical Politics from Spenser to Pope* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1983), 2–25.

supernatural machinery explicitly demanding this sacrifice, the fact that Hal is his own, deliberate Mercury, has made many readers disgusted with the prince for his cold heart: "for miracles are ceas'd / And therefore we must needs admit the means / How things are perfected" (*Henry V* I.i.67-69). On the other hand, Mercury is not a figure noted for warmth but rather for rhetorical prowess, a perfect sense of timing, and the unfailing ability to accomplish the tasks set for him. Hal's perfection pertains not to love or friendship, but to valor and policy, which constitute between them the "noble horsemanship" of successful government, allowing him to rein in "a fiery Pegasus." These plays do not ignore the human cost of Hal's successes, and they are both clear-sighted and ironically bracing in their representation of the realities of the political realm. Yet given the imagery that underwrites the dramatic design of these plays and its cultural implications, they are quite decisive in their approval of what Hal achieves and the ideal of England that he represents.





Marsha S. Robinson

## Mythoi of Brotherhood: Generic Emplotment in *Henry V*

In the English history plays, Shakespeare's generic choices are often expressed in a symbolic language indigenous to English historiography. The form of *Henry V* reflects the interplay of several traditions of historiographic practice, each of which appropriates the mythoi of fraternal strife and fraternal reconciliation to articulate the generic shape of the past. Shakespeare's repeated allusions to brotherhood, which are particularly significant in the complementary generic dynamics of *Richard II* and *Henry V*, are more than thematic; they are, in fact, a way of articulating form and genre.

This relationship between the figurative representation of historical content in the historian's narrative and the generic form implicit in any account of the past is illuminated by Hayden White's characterization of historical narratives as "verbal fictions" which "mediate" between "past events and processes" and the "story types that we conventionally use to endow the events of our lives with culturally sanctioned meanings."<sup>1</sup> White thus argues that historical discourse is generically "emplotted" as comedy, tragedy, romance or

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<sup>1</sup> Hayden White, "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," in his *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1978), 82, 88.

satire: the chronicle facts, which are "value-neutral" and could serve as the components of several kinds of stories, "are encoded by the use of the figurative language in which they are characterized, in order to permit their identification as elements of the particular story type to which *this story* belongs."<sup>2</sup> The historical narrative, then, can best be described as a "*complex of symbols*" which "points in two directions simultaneously: *toward* the events described in the narrative and *toward* the story type or mythos which the historian has chosen to serve as the icon of the structure of events."<sup>3</sup> White's explanation of the operation of historical discourse invites us to read the figures of brotherhood used to encode the facts of English historiography as signs of the generic story types apart from which the past is incomprehensible. Moreover, White's comment that "history-writing thrives on the discovery of all the possible plot structures that might be invoked to endow sets of events with different meanings"<sup>4</sup> illuminates the exploratory and provisional character of Shakespeare's quest for historiographic form.

Shakespeare's English history plays, like all histories, "mediate among . . . the *historical field*, the unprocessed *historical record*, *other historical accounts* and an *audience*."<sup>5</sup> Therefore, it is imperative that we not isolate these dramatic works from their historiographic heritage, but that we consider in some detail the generic strategies for "emplotting" the past which inform the historical accounts on which he drew. Such an approach requires that we entertain historical narratives, "the contents of which are as much *invented as found*,"<sup>6</sup> not merely as sources of historical content or fact, but as "literary artifacts," which as generic emplotments of the past provided Shakespeare with conceptual models against which he undertook

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<sup>2</sup> White, "Historicism, History, and the Figurative Imagination" in his *Tropics*, 109; White defines "emplotment," a term which I borrow (along with its cognates, "emplot" and "emplotted"), as "the encodation of the facts contained in the chronicle as components of specific *kinds* of plot structures, in precisely the way that Frye has suggested is the case with 'fictions' in general" ("Historical Text," 83).

<sup>3</sup> White, "Historical Text," 88.

<sup>4</sup> White, "Historical Text," 92.

<sup>5</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1973), 3.

<sup>6</sup> White, "Historical Text," 82.

his own rewriting of the English past. Thus Shakespeare's use of fraternal conflict as an informing principle in his English history plays reiterates not merely the thematic content, but the shape of both Christian and classical accounts of the past.<sup>7</sup> In these accounts secular history was often perceived as a fraternal contest for power and glory and expressed in formal patterns that counterposed the tragedy of fraternal strife with the comedy of brotherly reconciliation.<sup>8</sup>

One model for such accounts is St. Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, in which the Cain and Abel story is assigned an explanatory and seminal role. Augustine's vision of history not only influenced Christian historiography; his articulation of the tragicomic form of the history of salvation as well as his "political realism" shaped the ideology and the generic structure of the medieval mystery cycles.<sup>9</sup> Augustine's selective fashioning of biblical history provided a generic model for the formulation of secular history, one which Augustine applied in his analysis of the Roman empire, one which the English writers of the cycle plays invoked in their localization of biblical history and one which Shakespeare tested as he sought to create a dramatic model of English history.

Augustine, following Genesis 4:17-22, designates Cain, a fratricide, as the founder of the earthly city.<sup>10</sup> He thus identifies recurring fraternal conflict as the definitive pattern which informs secular history, a pattern often obscured by the mask of political cooperation. The counterpart of the earthly city is the heavenly city, the citizens of which are the symbolic heirs of Abel and his successor, Seth. The earthly city, driven by egotism and power, "glories in

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<sup>7</sup> See Clyde Kluckhohn, "Recurrent Themes in Myth and Mythmaking," in *Myth and Mythmaking*, ed. Henry A. Murray (New York: G. Braziller, 1960), 52. For a discussion of tragedy as fraternal violence see René Girard, *Violence and The Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1972).

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of the representation of power in medieval drama see John D. Cox, *Shakespeare and the Dramaturgy of Power* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1989), 23-25.

<sup>9</sup> Cox xi; V. A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1966), 57-67.

<sup>10</sup> St. Augustine, *The City Of God*, trans. John Healey, 2 vols. (1945; repr. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1973), 2:64.



itself"; the heavenly city glories in God.<sup>11</sup> Just as Cain's enmity toward his brother represents, Augustine argues, the hatred of the earthly city for the heavenly city, so the fraternal strife between Romulus and Remus, founders of Rome, symbolizes the enmity among members of the earthly city itself.<sup>12</sup> Attributing the conflict between brothers to the unwillingness of one partner to diminish his glory by sharing it with the other, Augustine characterizes the history of the earthly city as an account of "wars, altercations and appetites of short-lived or destructive victories" in which self-interest directs the pursuit of fame and honor.<sup>13</sup>

For St. Augustine history is linear and progressive and has a definite end. As literary fictions, endings as well as beginnings serve to encode Augustine's narrative as a particular genre.<sup>14</sup> The tragic history of the earthly city, destined to suffer its final end—damnation, culminates in the Last Judgment. On the other hand, the citizens of the heavenly city, sharing the communion of the saints and united by their love for God, enjoy eternal life. While the tragedy of fraternal strife is limited to time, the comedy of salvation, begun in time, is fulfilled in an apotheosis in which history is transcended and the members of the heavenly city share in the final triumph of the Church. It is this tragicomic pattern which informs the medieval mystery cycles in which "the role of Cain and Abel remains immensely significant, for it confirms the pattern of the Fall which will resonate through the entire series of plays until finally the 'two classes' of people will be separated on the Last Day of history."<sup>15</sup> In the typological structure of the Corpus Christi cycles, Abel's tragic death as a martyr anticipates Christ's death and the comedic redemption of history.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Augustine, 2:59. See Gail Kern Paster, *The Idea of the City in the Age of Shakespeare* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1985). Paster identifies the archetype of opposed cities as an ancient one, which appears in classical as well as scriptural sources, and is "always deeply involved with the notion of historical time" (2-13). She discusses the "bipolar image" of the city as it appears in Renaissance tragedy, masque and city comedy.

<sup>12</sup> Augustine 2:64.

<sup>13</sup> Augustine 2:63.

<sup>14</sup> White, "Historical Text," 98.

<sup>15</sup> Clifford Davidson, *From Creation to Doom* (New York: AMS Press, 1984), 46.

<sup>16</sup> Davidson, 46-47; Kolve, 66-67.

Another widespread influence on English historiography, the representation of internecine conflict in classical histories, provided a distinctive model of the past. Tragic or ironic, the generic shape of these accounts is essentially at odds with the linear and progressive form of Christian history with its tragicomic vision of time.<sup>17</sup> The past is represented as a cyclic alternation of unity and internecine discord in which typical sequences of behavior repeat themselves as part of an irreconcilable duality which is never supplanted. For example, Thucydides presents the Peloponnesian War as a tragic record of recurrent intestine factionalism motivated by a self-aggrandizement and ambition which turned Greek against Greek.<sup>18</sup> In these accounts of the devastating reverses of circumstance to which the city state is subject, Thucydides comments that blood proves a weaker tie than party, which violently divides classes and families. Not only does the father kill the son, but foreigners are invited by partisans to prey upon their fellow citizens. On the other hand, moments of human achievement are described in terms of the communal cooperation of citizens who with oaths of reconciliation unite in the face of immediate difficulty. History is thus represented as a continuous struggle between men and circumstances in which "human reason" is "defeated and crushed by the forces of irrationality."<sup>19</sup>

Although Shakespeare's formulation of history as fraternal conflict may well draw on the ultimately Augustinian historiography of the mystery plays, English historians themselves, incorporating both classical and Christian strategies of representation, fashioned the past as a story of fraternal discord. The Anglo-Norman chroniclers of the twelfth century, for example, many of whom serve as sources for the Tudor chroniclers, repeatedly represent the past as a story of fraternal discord. Their narratives illustrate the process of historical selection. The factual field is the object not of reduction but "distortion": the historian "'displaces' some facts to the periphery or back-

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<sup>17</sup> Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1957), 471.

<sup>18</sup> Cochrane, 473; Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, trans. Richard Crawley, Modern Library College Editions (Modern Library: New York, 1951), 3.80-86.

<sup>19</sup> Cochrane, 473.

ground and moves others closer to the center, encodes some as causes and others as effects, joins some and disjoins others...."<sup>20</sup> The resulting emplotment takes the form of a cycle in which tragic internecine conflict alternates with periods of comedic reconciliation: brothers prey upon brothers with impunity, periodically uniting to defeat their mutual enemies. Commenting that William of Normandy "did not even spare his own brother," Henry of Huntingdon, like his fellow historian, William of Malmesbury, invokes this cycle in his emplotment of the reigns of William the Conqueror and his sons and heirs—William II, Henry I, and Robert Duke of Normandy.<sup>21</sup> Unlike Augustine, who refuses to identify the heavenly city with political entities, Henry of Huntingdon implicitly designates the English as the party of Abel and interprets the internecine fierceness of the Cain-like Normans as evidence of their role as God's scourge, sent to "humble" the English nation.<sup>22</sup>

Speaking through the voices of the Norman lords, the historian Ordericus Vitalis even more self-consciously reflects the tragic pattern which he ascribes to Anglo-Norman history, perceiving it as inherent in the past itself. His text clearly demonstrates the way in which the invocation of a motif or figurative symbol—"brothers"—encodes the facts as a component of a particular kind of story. For example his query, "What happened to the Thebans under the two brothers, Eteocles and Polyneices?," summarizes in miniature the course of Anglo-Norman history and informs it with the shape of tragedy. Comparing the nation to a woman continually "suffering the pangs of labor" and "Cruelly harassed by [her] own sons," he uses a language of internal division to signal the generic shape of the past.<sup>23</sup> Like the other historians, he depicts a cycle of fraternal violence and mutual support: "But as discord makes divisions among them, and fatally arms them against each other, while they are victorious in foreign lands they are conquered by themselves and cut

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<sup>20</sup> White, "Historicism," 111–12.

<sup>21</sup> *The Chronicle of Henry of Huntingdon*, trans. Thomas Forester (1853; repr. New York: AMS Press, 1968), 217; *William Malmesbury's Chronicle of the Kings of England* (London, 1889), 331–33.

<sup>22</sup> Huntingdon, 216.

<sup>23</sup> Ordericus Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy*, trans. Thomas Forester, 4 vols. (1854; repr. New York: AMS Press, 1968), 2:433; 4:156–57.



each others throats without mercy. . . ."<sup>24</sup> Drawing on a classical use of fratricide to encode accounts of internecine conflict, Ordericus, like Augustine, presents fraternal conflict as unnatural—the mark of the immorality of secular history. Moreover, his juxtaposition of tragic and comedic emplotments, exemplified in the very language of this passage, demystifies communal cooperation. Because such reconciliations, as Augustine remarks, give rise to the kind of self-interested concord exhibited by a band of pirates,<sup>25</sup> Ordericus represents them as ironic inversions of the comedic reconciliation of brothers.

It is Geoffrey of Monmouth in his *History of the Kings of Britain*, however, who most clearly articulates the pattern, projecting onto a fictitious British past the generic outlines of Anglo-Norman accounts of the past.<sup>26</sup> The distinctive feature of his narrative is its formal unity. The unique details of historical discourse which populate the literal surface of historical narratives and which often defy formal coherence are supplanted by the "figurative element." The generic form of the past, which in most historical narratives recedes to "the interior of the discourse," is foregrounded.<sup>27</sup> In each successive reign the ruling heir is challenged or even deposed by an ambitious brother (sometimes one with whom he jointly shares the throne), cousin or other relative.<sup>28</sup> For example, Mempricius and Malim, the great-grandsons of Brute, contest the throne, struggling for possession of the island, and Mempricius murders his brother in a meeting ostensibly planned to forge "concord betwixt them."<sup>29</sup> The threat of internecine destruction is further dramatized in a second scenario—the return of the exiled brother (sometimes accompanied by a foreign army) to reclaim his patrimony. Both of these scenarios anticipate Shakespeare's representation of the English past in which "brothers" are displaced and then return, as do Henry Bolingbroke and the Earl of Richmond, to displace their rivals. Treating his

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<sup>24</sup> Ordericus, 4:156–57.

<sup>25</sup> Augustine, 1:115; Cochrane, 489.

<sup>26</sup> Robert W. Hanning, *The Vision of History in Early Britain: From Gildas to Geoffrey of Monmouth* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1966), 139.

<sup>27</sup> White, "Historicism," 115.

<sup>28</sup> Hanning, 142–43.

<sup>29</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*, Sebastian Evans translation revised by Charles W. Dunn (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1958), 32–33.



material from an almost secular perspective, Geoffrey does not condemn the brothers in his history as Cains, but with the detachment which also anticipates Shakespeare, he presents their often disastrous choices as representatives of forces of personal desire and individual destiny, forces at odds with the political relationships which determine national unity.<sup>30</sup>

Geoffrey's tragic scenarios are juxtaposed with interludes of reconciliation in which hierarchy is reaffirmed as the brothers become one in unity or acknowledge differences in lineal rank.<sup>31</sup> The motif of two becoming one—the effacement of all difference, encoded even in the alliterative names of pairs—figuratively represents the comedic ending which generically identifies these stories. Exiled brothers are restored to their patrimony, and the nation is united. Such reconciliation inspires foreign conquests as reunited brothers, typified by Belinus and Brennius, venture forth to conquer the Franks and finally Rome itself.<sup>32</sup> In this formulation fraternal strife is temporarily supplanted by a spirit of unity. History gives way to romance as a tragic or ironic model of the past is displaced by a model of what should be.

Geoffrey presents such moments as “exemplary” history: “the end of fraternal strife restores civil harmony and paves the way for the conquest of foreign lands.”<sup>33</sup> These scenarios, however, do not ultimately provide comedic closure, for Geoffrey's cyclic history has no “ending.”<sup>34</sup> His classical and secular vision of history as a contest of irreconcilable forces casts an ironic shadow on these moments of success; the empowering of the nation incites ambition and issues in or is inextricably linked with the resurgence of national crisis in

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<sup>30</sup> Hanning, 125–26, 142, 159–60. Geoffrey is the source for Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville's *Gorboduc* (1562). A forerunner of the Marlovian and Shakespearean history play (Irby B. Cauthen, Jr., ed., *Gorboduc or Ferrex and Porrex* [Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1970], xiv), this drama didactically portrays fraternal strife as the tragic sequel to any deviation from “single rule.” The play's polarized iteration of this historiographic pattern provided the Elizabethan auditor with a model for interpreting the present and future, a model which foregrounds issues of unity, authority and succession.

<sup>31</sup> Geoffrey, 61–63.

<sup>32</sup> Geoffrey, 51–56.

<sup>33</sup> Hanning, 125–26, 145.

<sup>34</sup> Hanning, 140.

which personal ambition reasserts itself as civil conflict.<sup>35</sup> In Geoffrey's formulation of history the unity of brothers anticipates not an ending, but the renewal of a pattern of fraternal hostility and thus ironically defies generic expectations.

The Tudor historian Edward Hall, in contrast, invokes the conflict of brothers to articulate a tragicomic formulation of the past in which English history is a chapter in the history of salvation, the ending of which anticipates Christian apotheosis. In his *The Vnion of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre and Yorke*, Hall sets forth the conflict between heirs as a manifestation of the tragic "intestine deuision" between "the brother and the brother" as one instance of the factionalism which had shaped the history of European realms.<sup>36</sup> Commenting in his introduction that unity cannot be comprehended apart from division, Hall represents the record of warring brothers as both a tragic story of suffering and death and a prelude to the restoration of concord enacted in the marriage of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York. Hall's opening analogy between marriage and Christian redemption, part of an ode to unity, becomes an identification in the conclusion of his account, in which he celebrates this union as a succession of the "ioy" by which "peace was thoughte to discende oute of heauē into England..."<sup>37</sup>

Hall's articulation of the Tudor view of the state as a redemptive agency is, however, destabilized by a political realism inherent in any detailed chronicling of fact. The past as an account of warring brothers is represented in a modality which is at odds with and thus ignores providential design.<sup>38</sup> Hall's tragicomic emplotment—unity born out of division—is divested of its informing power and disengaged from the text. For although Hall finally describes the Tudor dispensation "as a thyng by God elected and provided," he immediately proceeds to record Henry's continuing preoccupation with the suppression of "dyuision" and "dissencion."<sup>39</sup> His generic model of

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<sup>35</sup> Hanning, 148–49.

<sup>36</sup> Edward Hall, *Hall's Chronicle* (London, 1809), 1.

<sup>37</sup> Hall, 1–2, 425.

<sup>38</sup> Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Divine Providence in the England of Shakespeare's Histories* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1970), 122–23.

<sup>39</sup> Hall, 425.

tragic conflict superseded by providential apotheosis gives way to a continuing pattern of conflict.

In his English histories, Shakespeare more self-consciously enlists the conventional plot scenarios of fraternal conflict and cooperation, testing their iconic power to inform the past and deconstructing familiar patterns. Just as the form of *Richard II* is, for example, articulated in terms of the biblical paradigm of fraternal conflict, so *Henry V* dramatizes the comedic or romantic resolution of that cycle—brotherly reconciliation and redemption.<sup>40</sup> The play's comedic or romantic emplotment is dramatized not only by recurring references to brotherhood but by iconic and exemplary strategies which create the play's "ceremonial" representation.<sup>41</sup> Supporting a vision of unity, these strategies enforce the unity of the text itself.

The play's reenactment of these modes is counterpointed by its denial of the complementary tragic phase of this cycle, expressed in its suppression and isolation of tragedy and its displacement of violence. The comedic voice of the play, a voice of denial, ironically evokes a "tragic emplotment" of events which challenges the very form of the play. As White explains, "The same set of events can serve as components of a story that is tragic *or* comic, as the case may be, depending on the historian's choice of the plot structure that he considers appropriate for ordering events of that kind so as to make them into a comprehensible story."<sup>42</sup> Shakespeare's creation of dual emplotments is a characterizing feature of sophisticated historical texts, which are "always written as part of a contest between contending poetic configurations of what the past *might* consist of."<sup>43</sup> Mediating between contending emplotments,<sup>44</sup> Shakespeare qualifies Henry's comedic vision of reconciliation with a tragic model of events.

The form of *Henry V* is illuminated by the generic dynamics of *Richard II*, which, in its representation of fraternal conflict, appears

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<sup>40</sup> *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. David Bevington (Glenview, Ill.: Scott Foresman, 1980). All quotations follow this edition.

<sup>41</sup> Herbert Lindenberger, *Historical Drama: The Relation of Literature to Reality* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1975), 78–82.

<sup>42</sup> White, "Historical Text," 84.

<sup>43</sup> White, "Historical Text," 98.

<sup>44</sup> Hayden White, "The Fictions of Factual Representation," in *Tropics*, 129.

to be the tragic counterpart of the comedy of reconciliation. In *Richard II* Shakespeare juxtaposes the tragic conflict of Cain and Abel and an ironic version of that story in which secular history is distanced from redemptive history. Challenging Mowbray, Bolingbroke covertly identifies Richard as his uncle's murderer, a figurative Cain who

Sluic'd out his innocent soul through streams of  
blood—

Which blood, like sacrificing Abel's, cries,  
Even from the tongueless caverns of the earth,  
To me for justice and rough chastisement.

(I.i.103-6)

He assigns himself the role of avenger on behalf of Gloucester, whose identity as sacrificing Abel (104) is reinforced by the Duchess of Gloucester's entreaty addressed to Gaunt—an appeal to “brotherhood” and a protest against the desecration of a sacred heritage symbolized by the Plantagenet blood of her murdered husband (I.ii.9–36). Ostensibly defending the old dispensation, symbolized by the anointed blood of Edward III, against unnatural violation, Bolingbroke assumes the role of Abel's champion. He implicitly aligns himself with England, whose bloodstained “earth” is metaphorically identified as the temporal locus of the heavenly city. Richard, in turn, associates his adversary, whom Shakespeare significantly casts in the role of a brother—“Were he my brother, nay, my kingdom's heir, / As he is but my father's brother's son” (I.i.116–17)—with the heartless and violent power of Cain (III.ii.111).

Exposing the moral posturing, Shakespeare anamorphically conflates his Cains and Abels in their shifting relationship to power and right. Although Cain's exile, the biblical anticipation of the separation of the heavenly city from the earthly city, is repeatedly invoked by the participants as a God-ordained punishment for the apostasy of rebellion, exile in fact dramatizes shifting relations of power in the earthly city (I.iii.198–203), much as it does in Geoffrey's account of the past. Moreover, it foreshadows the recurrence of violence as brothers return to claim their patrimony. Thus Bolingbroke, Mowbray (Richard's surrogate), Richard, and finally Exton (Bolingbroke's surrogate), each forced into "exile" by a "brother,"



are condemned by their enemies as apostate violators of the body politic—"With Cain go wander through shades of night" (V.vi.43; I.iii.176-77). Each, on the other hand, identifies himself with Abel. Bolingbroke portrays himself as Abel's defender. Richard, in his martyr-like role as Cain's victim, is implicitly compared to Abel and fashions himself as Abel's typological counterpart, Christ (IV.i.170-72). Even Mowbray and Exton belie their roles as Cains; a crusader, the exiled Mowbray serves Christ in the very capacity which Bolingbroke repeatedly covets for himself and later dies in Venice, yielding up his soul to Christ (IV.i.93-101); in contrast, Bolingbroke's death in the Jerusalem Room at Westminster, not the Holy Land (2 *Henry IV* IV.v.232-40), ironically signifies his Cain-like exile in the earthly city. Exton, Richard's murderer, believes he serves Henry in his role as the Lord's Anointed.

Although in *Richard II* the struggle between brothers is fashioned by the contestants as a conflict between Abel and his apostate enemy Cain, Shakespeare, like Augustine, challenges myths of legitimacy which support the power of worldly empires. The identification of England as the heavenly city—the inheritance of Abel—is counterpointed with a vision which undermines the assumptions of a whole tradition of Christian historiography in which the state is a "monument to God's ordering of history," and the "political or social hero" is informed with the "nature of both Christ and Caesar."<sup>45</sup> The tragic demise of Richard as the Lord's Anointed and thus Abel's representative is emplotted as an ironic struggle for power among the descendants of Cain, whose pretensions to moral legitimacy belie the true foundations of the earthly city—power and self-interest. A play in which successive monarchs assume the role of Cain (V.vi.45-46), *Richard II* enacts the shape of history as recurring fraternal conflict.

Because *Henry V* is a self-conscious work of historiography, the play itself calls attention to the problematic relationship of genre and history. The selective processes by which the facts of history take on

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<sup>45</sup> Hanning, 31-43; Cox, 12-15. Augustine's skepticism of the political order sets him at odds not only with classical idealism but with the assumptions of Christian historians for whom the history of the Christian state is synonymous with the history of the heavenly city.

generic form are often transparent; the past is clearly a text subject to the shaping of the historian. In *Henry V*, generic fashioning becomes evident in what the historian leaves out as much as in what he includes.<sup>46</sup> One of many such incidents which allude to the recurrence of fraternal violence, the Southampton plot (II.ii) illustrates Shakespeare's use of selective strategies to invoke one generic formulation and suppress an alternative representation.

The operation of the selective process becomes clear when one examines the chroniclers' attempts to place this event in the larger pattern of historical change. Assuming the retrospective view of the historian, Tudor chroniclers generally represent the Southampton plot as an anticipation of the Wars of the Roses. Recounting Henry's discovery of the conspiracy and his efficient dispatch of the perpetrators, Hall, for example, proceeds to place the event in the broader historical continuum, identifying it as a prologue to the eventual demise of the house of Lancaster:

But if he [Henry] had cast his eye to the fyre that was newly kindled, he should haue surely sene an horrible flame incēsed against the walles of his owne house and family, by the which in conclusion his line and stocke was cleane destroyed and consumed to ashes, which fire at that very tyme paradvventure might haue bene quenched and put out.<sup>47</sup>

In the works of Hall and Holinshed this tragic interlude is juxtaposed in chronicle fashion with heroic accounts of Henry's reign; the poet-historian Samuel Daniel, however, attempts to present a coherent generic model of the past. Emplotting his *The Civil Wars* as tragedy, he foregrounds the Southampton plot as smoldering evidence of "the lowe depressed fire, / Whose after-issuing flames confounded all" (5.1).<sup>48</sup> Daniel self-consciously reflects on the tensions arising from his generic emplotment. He must eschew the

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<sup>46</sup> White ("Historical Text," 90-1), discusses Levi-Strauss's theory that "the coherence" of the historian's "story" is achieved by the exclusion of "one or more of the domains of facts."

<sup>47</sup> Hall, 61.

<sup>48</sup> Samuel Daniel, *The Civil Wars*, ed. Laurence Michel (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1958).

"intermedled good report" characteristic of chronicle accounts in which inclusiveness supplants generic formulation (5.13). Having committed himself to a tragic account of the past—"Nothing but blood-shed, treasons, sinne and shame'" (5.6)—he can "onely tell the worst of euerie Raigne" (5.13).<sup>49</sup> Given his program of selection, the representation of Henry's reign, as Daniel acknowledges, becomes problematic. He must subordinate "this so happy a meane-while" (5.33)—an allusion to Henry's enlightened policies of national reconciliation—as a mere parenthesis in a tragic discourse, in which, he laments, the glorious battle of Agincourt has no place (5.13).

The chroniclers and Daniel not only identify the Southampton plot as part of a tragic formulation of the past, they disclose the motives of Cambridge, Grey and Scroop, the king's would-be assassins. Hall, for example, questions the motive of greed confessed by the conspirators, who according to some reports had been bought by the French:

diuerse write that Richard earle of Cambridge did not conspire with the lorde Scrope and Sir Thomas Graye to murder kyng Henry to please the Frenche kyng withal, but onely to thentent to exalte to the croune his brotherinlawe Edmonde earle of Marche as heyre to duke Lyonel.<sup>50</sup>

Revealing that the conspirators were supporters of Lyonel's heir, the descendant of an elder brother, Hall redefines the plot as a recurrence of fraternal conflict and so discloses its tragic configuration: hierarchical differences are effaced as king and subject are identified as rival kinsmen, contenders for the crown and near equals in their rights and claims.

Although the conspiracy in fact challenges the success of the policy of reconciliation and reinstatement by which Henry sought to control and re-assimilate his father's enemies, particularly the Yorkist claimants (II.ii.25–31),<sup>51</sup> in *Henry V* this plot against the king, dis-

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<sup>49</sup> White ("Historicism," 111–2) describes generic formulation as a selective process which is not a reduction but a "distortion of the factual field."

<sup>50</sup> Hall, 61.

<sup>51</sup> See G. L. Harriss, "The King and His Magnates," in *Henry V: The Practice of Kingship*, ed. G. L. Harriss (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985), 31–51. Harriss discusses the Southampton plot as a renewal of the rebellion against Henry IV (36–37).



covered on the eve of Henry's embarkation to France, appears strangely transformed. Shakespeare divests the conspiracy of the tragic identity assigned to it by the chroniclers and Daniel. Instead, he uses iconic strategies of representation to divorce the incident from the historical continuum, and thus he contains it.<sup>52</sup> First of all, this account of the insurrection is detached from the past and future to which it implicitly points, offering no analysis of political cause and effect. It is presented as neither a replay of the Ricardian conspiracies which plagued Henry IV nor a reciprocal reenactment of the familial bloodshed of the past—specifically the murder of Richard II.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, it is distanced from the anticipation (in the Epilogue) of the fraternal conflict between the Lancastrian and Yorkist parties which "made his England bleed."

Ignoring the questions of precedent and outcome essential to historical discourse, Shakespeare not only isolates the event from its temporal context but obscures its motivation.<sup>54</sup> Henry seizes upon the conspirators' confession that they acted out of greed, appearing to accept this motive at face value (II.ii.88–91) despite Cambridge's ambiguous disclaimer (155–56). In addition, the particular historical details which would disclose factionalism are effaced; Shakespeare is silent about the genealogical facts or political alliances which might reveal the reciprocity of the adversaries and identify the assassination plot as a manifestation of fraternal enmity.<sup>55</sup>

Here, as elsewhere in the play, it is Henry who rewrites events,

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<sup>52</sup> James R. Siemon, *Shakespearean Iconoclasm* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1985), 103–4. Siemon argues that, despite Henry's allegorical shaping of this scene as a symbol of his magnanimity, it "pushes into the realm of history, where at each moment disorder and discrepancy force one to take up the burden of interpretation, to consider before and after, origin and end, purpose and conclusion without any promise of satisfying certainty to come." I would suggest that the scene itself successfully represses such inquiry except at one point—the concession of motive—although, as I argue below, other parts of the play contest the generic representation of this scene, reidentifying it as a story of re-emergent civil conflict.

<sup>53</sup> Karl P. Wintersdorf, "The Conspiracy of Silence in *Henry V*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 27 (Summer 1976): 272–74.

<sup>54</sup> Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, "History and Ideology: The Instance of *Henry V*," in *Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. John Drakakis (London: Methuen, 1985), 220.

<sup>55</sup> Wintersdorf, 271, 274.



collaborating with the Chorus, an "official historian."<sup>56</sup> In this scene the tragedy of fraternal discord is effaced and finally supplanted in a coherent and self-contained drama which evokes the Last Judgment. Depoliticizing and universalizing the conspiracy, Henry in fact stages a biblical drama of sin and judgment in which he assumes a God-like role as the embodiment of an impartial justice (II.ii.174)—righteous, inclined to mercy, but implacable in the face of sin.<sup>57</sup> Attributing the conspiracy to unfathomable human depravity, he characterizes the defection of his intimate friend, Scroop, as "Another fall of man" (II.ii.142). He thus magnifies the conspirators' treason as a type of the spiritual apostasy of both Adam and Cain, whose rebellion is structurally represented as a second fall in the medieval cycle plays.<sup>58</sup> Interestingly, this moral emplotment echoes the medieval account commissioned by Henry, in which the conspirators, condemned as "Judas-like," are implicitly linked with Cain, Judas' typological counterpart in the cycle plays.<sup>59</sup> Evoking history's final drama in which justice triumphs over sin, Henry dissociates himself from motives of revenge (174) and identifies himself with both law (143, 176–77) and mercy. He thus denies his reciprocal relationship with his opponents. They in turn, "rejoic[ing]" (159, 161) in the providential discovery of their betrayal, assume the roles of penitents and suppliants, signaling their subordination to the king.

In concert with Henry, the Chorus pursues the theme of betrayal; "English monsters" (II.ii.85) and a "nest of hollow bosoms" (II.pro.21), Cambridge, Scroop and Grey are demonized (II.ii.111–25) as unnatural "children" (II.pro.19). Moreover, their violence and

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<sup>56</sup> Emmon Grennan, "'This Story Shall the Good Man Teach His Son': *Henry V* and the Art of History," *Papers on Language and Literature* 15 (Fall 1979): 371.

<sup>57</sup> See John H. Walter, ed. *King Henry V*, the Arden Shakespeare (1954; repr. London: Methuen, 1979). Interpreting Henry as an emblematic figure—the ideal Christian prince—he reads this scene as an exemplum of kingly justice, clemency (xviii) and magnanimity (xvi) and argues that Henry is, like "pius Aeneas," an agent of God's plan (xxv). Dollimore and Sinfield, in contrast, comment on the universalizing of this defection (220) as a political strategy. The dual emplotment allows us to entertain Henry as both an emblem of justice and an astute politician adept at rewriting events and staging his own Doomsday pageant.

<sup>58</sup> *Gesta Henrici Quinti: The Deeds of Henry V*, trans. and ed. Frank Taylor and John S. Roskell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 19; Kolve, 85.

<sup>59</sup> Dollimore and Sinfield, 217.

disloyalty are displaced upon the French enemy with whom they are linked (II.ii.88-90, 100). Ironically belying insurrection, this fiction preserves the play's affirmation of "one consent" (I.ii.181, 206; II.ii.20-24). A moralized vision of English unanimity is invoked as a standard for exposing the immorality and unEnglish otherness of the conspirators (II.ii.126-40). The tragic dimensions of the Southampton plot are thus exorcised in a generic metamorphosis by which tragedy, a mere prelude to the reaffirmation of divine order, corroborates the play's insistent declaration of unity. Tragedy is subsumed by and anticipates the romance of brotherly reconciliation.

Henry's generic representation of the conspiracy is characteristic of the political fashioning of history in *Henry V*. Holinshed suggests that the official account of the conspiracy was in fact a fabrication: "their [the conspirators'] purpose was well inough then perceiued, although happilie not much bruted abroad, for considerations thought necessarie to haue it rather husht and kept secret."<sup>60</sup> Shakespeare allows us to witness the fashioning of this event, dramatizing the process which began in Henry's court. The suppression of brotherly conflict is of course clearer to the modern reader with access to documents which suggest that the motive of greed was apparently the invention of Walsingham, a Lancastrian apologist, as was the identification of Scroop as the intimate of the king.<sup>61</sup> Both fictions obscured the grievances of the dispossessed Earl of March, whom Henry had forced to pay a huge marriage fine, and of Richard, Earl of Cambridge, who in keeping with Henry's program of reconciliation with his enemies, had been given a title, but had never been awarded any source of income.<sup>62</sup> These facts, excluded from official accounts, disclose the continuation of brotherly discord. Henry's manipulation of the Lyonel faction through economic strangulation was in fact interpreted by the Earl of March, who feared that the king would "undoe him," as an act of metaphorical violence.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Raphael Holinshed, *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, 6 vols. (London, 1807), 3:72.

<sup>61</sup> T. B. Pugh, *Henry V and the Southampton Plot of 1415* (London: Alan Sutton, 1988), 156, 109.

<sup>62</sup> Pugh, 97-102.

<sup>63</sup> Harriss, 46.

Most of these facts were probably not available to the Tudor chroniclers or to Shakespeare. He plays on the ambiguity of the confession as well as the fictitious character of the indictments for treason, confirmed, in this case, by the retrospective acknowledgment (made official by Yorkist claimants) that the "traitors" were never legally convicted (1 *Henry VI* II.iv.96-97).<sup>64</sup> Although the conspirators (except Scroop) confessed to a plan to elevate the Earl of March by taking him into Wales and proclaiming him king, those who wrote the indictment, in their effort to win a conviction for treason, charged the conspirators with having plotted to assassinate the king and his brothers. This fiction was designed to substantiate the conventional charge, derived by implication, of "imagining and compassing the king's death."<sup>65</sup> Shakespeare's allusion to unvoiced motives activates the dissonance between medieval accounts, which invoke this event to affirm national unity, and the Tudor perspective, in which it figures as a continuation of and motive for the feud between brothers, inspiring the revenge of Richard Plantagenet, Cambridge's son. The Southampton plot ironically anticipates the demise of Lancastrian fortunes and the reinstatement of the Yorkist faction in the person of Edward IV, grandson of Richard, Earl of Cambridge. In a reversal of roles in which Cains and Abels change places, the three Lancastrian kings would in 1460 be declared usurpers, and the perpetrator of this treason, Richard of Cambridge, would later by parliamentary decree lose the name of traitor.<sup>66</sup>

Henry represents his violent repression of fraternal conflict as a type of the Last Judgment and thus disengages this confrontation from the familiar tragic emplotment which encodes acts of internecine conflict. Henry's celebration of the battle of Agincourt is, in contrast, fashioned in terms of the comedy of brotherly reconciliation and Christian redemption. Henry implicitly compares the communal cooperation of his soldiers to the transcendent fellowship of the heavenly city. Like Christ who calls his obedient followers his brothers, Henry promises that "he today that sheds his blood with

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<sup>64</sup> Pugh, 129.

<sup>65</sup> Pugh, 129-30. See also John G. Bellamy, *The Tudor Law of Treason: An Introduction* (Buffalo: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1979), 9-11.

<sup>66</sup> Pugh, 133-35, 129.



me / Shall be my brother" (IV.iii.61-62) and styles himself as one of a "happy few, we band of brothers" (60). Framed as prognostication, Henry's account of the yearly commemoration of the battle of Agincourt (IV.iii.39-67) anticipates the end to which Christian history points; national history becomes a type of the history of salvation in which tragedy is eclipsed and history redeemed.

Evoking the spiritual and eschatological connotation of brotherhood, Henry, in fact, transforms English history to national hagiography—an account of the suffering and triumphs of the heavenly city as a brotherhood of saints. Just as the hagiographer exhorts the brotherhood of the faithful to endure by reminding them of the Christian's ultimate consolation—the promise of eternal life—<sup>67</sup>so Henry exhorts his men to endure by envisioning for them the consolation promised to national heroes—historiographic fame (51-59). And just as hagiographic literature celebrates death in the company of Christian brothers—one's fellow martyrs—as a privilege and an honor,<sup>68</sup> so Henry's anticipatory account of English history celebrates the felicity of death in the company of fellow Englishmen—a select brotherhood of national saints. Henry distinguishes this new nobility from that nobility conferred by blood (61-63). Elevating achievement over inheritance, he honors a perseverance and self-sacrifice motivated by a secular faith—patriotism.

Henry completes the spiritualization of English history by transforming the future commemoration of the battle of Agincourt into a secular feast day memorializing those martyrs who gave their lives for the faith.<sup>69</sup> Unifying the observance of the martyrdom of Sts. Crispinus and Crispianus, whose feast day it is, with the annual remembrance of the heroism of this band of brothers, Henry reinforces the image of a sacred brotherhood. Crispinus and Crispianus, brothers and wealthy heirs to a secular patrimony, succeed to a more

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<sup>67</sup> Helen C. White, *Tudor Books of Saints and Martyrs* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1963), 8-9. White identifies the address "of consolation and encouragement to the faithful in time of persecution" as one of the most significant "hagiographic genres."

<sup>68</sup> Helen C. White, 9-10.

<sup>69</sup> Helen C. White, 14. The "afterlife" of the martyr is historical as well as transhistorical. In conflating the celebration of Agincourt with the yearly commemoration of a saint's day, Henry invests historical deeds with the kind of transcendence reserved for the sacrifices of Christian martyrs.



transcendent brotherhood as heirs of Christ. They embrace the Christian faith and live as humble shoemakers, sharing the gospel in the face of persecution.<sup>70</sup> As martyred brothers, not only do they embody Henry's vision of his band of brothers, but their conversion to the Christian faith metaphorically echoes the historic change implicit in Henry's fashioning of events: the subordination of patriarchal and aristocratic notions of allegiance to a new concept—allegiance to country. In creating a new brotherhood of secular saints, Henry forges bonds of communal allegiance, honoring those who are willing to subordinate individual ambition to public goals.

As members of the happy band of brothers, the four Captains—the Welsh Fluellen, the Irish Macmorris, the Scots Jamy and the English Gower—are actors in a comedy of brotherly reconciliation. Foils to the quarrelsome, unsoldierly French, they courteously and generously pay tribute to one another's valor and professionalism and enjoy the comradery of yokefellows committed to a mutual task (III.ii.63–65, 75–81). The ethnic and national divisions dramatically voiced in the distinctive dialects of these officers are discounted by Gower, who rebukes Pistol's xenophobic contempt for Fluellen: "You thought, because he could not speak English in the native garb, he could not therefore handle an English cudgel" (V.i.73–75).

The play's comedic vision of the English past—its denial of ethnic differences—is, of course, at odds with the audience's awareness of a continuing history of ethnic rebellion. For as the play elsewhere indicates, in 1599 the English audience awaits news of the subjection of Ireland (V.pro.29–34). Thus, ethnic animosities surface even in the midst of a supportive communal dialogue. For example, the outraged "What ish my nation?" (III.ii.121) with which Captain Macmorris responds to Fluellen's innocent allusion to "many of your nation" (120) fiercely contests the dehumanization of the Irish by their English oppressors. Stigmatized as "a villain, and a bastard, and a knave, and a rascal" (121–22), the Irishman was of course excluded from both the contest of brothers, a story of near equals, and the comedy of fraternal reconciliation. Hardly candidates for brotherhood, the Irish, like the French before them, were "the

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<sup>70</sup> *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, ed. Herbert Thurston and Don Atwater (New York: P. J. Kenedy, 1956), 4:197–98.

other"—the victims of the imperialism which brotherhood inspires. Intimations of tragedy, the deep and irreconcilable divisions articulated by this Irish voice, like the voices at Southampton, must, of course, be muted and transfigured as they are in this scene: "Gentlemen both, you will mistake each other," cautions Gower (133).

Because England's politically sensitive relationships with a rebellious Ireland and an independent Scotland do not support an English story of fraternal reconciliation, Shakespeare selectively foregrounds Fluellen, a shadow of the Welsh-born Henry, as a symbol of the spirit of patriotic unity—a corporate nationalism which in the world of the play transcends these ethnic differences.<sup>71</sup> Playing the stranger, Henry, the first among Englishmen, disguises himself as Henry Le Roy, "a Welshman" and proclaims to a hostile Pistol that he is Fluellen's countryman, friend "And his kinsman too" (IV.i.51–59). Henry not only acknowledges the power of bonds based on ethnic and national identity, he at once enacts the effacement of the differences he celebrates. Henry—king and commoner, Welshman and Englishman—becomes all things to all people to win them to his cause, forging fraternal bonds which permeate social, ethnic and national boundaries.

The comedy of reconciliation is enacted on the field of Agincourt itself where the king's identification of himself as a Welshman and Fluellen as his "good countryman" (IV.vii.104) is reciprocally acknowledged by Fluellen: "I am your Majesty's countryman" (110). However, shared nativity, Fluellen realizes, is but a material bond, and thus his kinship with Henry, like the brotherhood of the four Captains in the play, is a spiritual one, a shared integrity. For Fluellen will confess their relatedness "so long as your Majesty is an honest man" (IV.vii.118–19). Just as Henry fashions the battle of Agincourt, so Fluellen proceeds to rewrite Welsh history as a comedy of fraternal cooperation. Shakespeare's allusion to Holinshed's tragic record of atrocities done in 1399 by the monstrous Welsh women on the bodies of dead Englishmen in *1 Henry IV* is succeeded in *Henry V* by Fluellen's record of "good service" in a French garden of leeks, where the Welsh reappear as brothers-in-arms to the

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<sup>71</sup> Joan Rees, "Shakespeare's Welshmen," in *Literature and Nationalism*, ed. Vincent Newey and Ann Thompson (Savage, Md.: Barnes & Noble Books, 1991), 29.

English (97–98).<sup>72</sup> Conflating a Welsh St. David's day victory, sometimes identified as a Celtic defeat of the Saxons, with the Black Prince's victory at Crécy, Fluellen creates an account of "St. Davy's day" which both validates Welsh nationalistic pride and is ironically refashioned to serve "English purposes" (II.pro.15). Connecting the past with the present, this narrative places the battle of Agincourt in the broader context of English history as a continuing comedy of fraternal reconciliation intrinsically connected to the staging of a foreign war. Incorporated into the fabric of English history, St. David's day—a memorial to Welsh valor—anticipates and is subsumed by St. Crispin's day. A celebration of brotherly cooperation, it commemorates the reconciliation of ethnic differences which like "many arrows, loosed several ways, / Come to one mark" (I.ii.207–8). The generic impulse of comedy—incorporation—is thus enacted again and again in the representation of ethnic brothers. The embodiment of this incorporation, Fluellen, the king's kin, countryman and double, collaborates with Henry to create an incorporative history of English fraternity, which honors difference while invoking an inclusive English brotherhood as the earthly model of the fellowship that epitomizes the heavenly city.

Henry's fashioning of the past and future as a comedy of reconciliation conflates the history of redemption with the triumphs of the earthly city. Shakespeare, in contrast, distances the earthly city from its heavenly counterpart by destabilizing Henry's emplotment, in which tragedy is averted and transformed. The comedic unity of the play is, in fact, constantly under siege as inverse accounts of fraternal discord surface. For example, the tragic outlines of the Southampton plot and the intimations of ethnic hostility emerge displaced onto another fraternal triumvirate, the fictional conspirators, Bardolph, Nym and Pistol, "three sworn brothers" (II.i.12). The Southampton plot is, in fact, the centerpiece in a dramatic triptych, the flanking panels of which reenact the classical emplotment of history as a tragic or ironic cycle of fraternal violence and reconciliation. A parodic version of Henry's comedic representation

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<sup>72</sup> Rees, 22; 33–34. Weighing the documentary support for Fluellen's account, Rees discusses the conflicting accounts of this Welsh victory and the origins of the Welsh celebration of St. David's day.



of the conspiracy, Act II, scene i burlesques the quarrel of brothers. Nym and Pistol draw swords; their mutual threats of murder reenact the discord among brothers disguised by the official account of the Southampton plot (II.i.35-73). Vying for the hand of Mistress Quickly, who is married to Pistol but was contracted to Nym, they openly contest a reductive version of the competing claims which remain unspoken in Henry's encounter with his co-claimant. Suspending this quarrel, the announcement of Falstaff's death with the explanation "the King has kill'd his heart" (II.i.88) not only restages Henry's own betrayal by his intimate friend, Scroop, but also implicates Henry himself in the reciprocal economy of fraternal hostility.

A reenactment of the historiographic comedy of affiliation, the third scene (II.iii) in this triptych counterpoints the first. Echoing Henry's assurance that "every rub is smoothed" (II.ii.188), Pistol's promise to Nym that "friendship shall combine, and brotherhood" (II.i.109) anticipates an alternate story, one which will supplant the conflict of brothers played out in this scene. The reconciliation is, however, an ironic and starkly realistic version of the idealized national unity Henry constructs for the audience in scene ii. Brotherly unity is achieved by the repression of differences which still fester (Nym cannot kiss the hostess goodbye); confederacy is merely a redirection of predatory self-interest: "Yoke-fellows in arms, / Let us to France, like horse-leeches, my boys, / To suck, to suck, the very blood to suck!" (II.iii.53-55). The thievish ambitions of Pistol, Nym, and Bardolph, "sworn brothers in filching" (III.ii.43-44), expose both the ambitions of another triumvirate—the would-be usurpers of the crown—and the imperial ambitions of Henry himself. Enclosing Henry's comedic and self-contained staging of history, this parodic reenactment of the historiographic fictions of fraternal violence and brotherly reconciliation reformulates the past in both a tragic and ironic mode. Generically transformed, Henry's story is subsumed as part of a continuing pattern of internecine violence which informs Anglo-Norman accounts of the English past. Just as the Anglo-Normans, driven by self-interest, destroy their brothers and then turn their mutual hostility against their enemies, so the English unite to prey upon the French.

Shakespeare, in fact, interrogates Henry's model of national brotherhood—a fellowship of saints bound together by mutual love—



invoking an alternative model of community, a sworn brotherhood of thieves. Shakespeare's critique of the pragmatic bonds which support national unity echoes Augustine's depiction of the earthly city as a confederation of thieves:

Set justice aside then, and what are kingdoms but fair thievish purchases? For what are thieves' purchases but little kingdoms, for in theft the hands of the underlings are directed by the commander, the confederacy of them is sworn together, and the pillage is shared by law amongst them? And if those ragamuffins grow up to be able to keep forts, build habitations, possess cities, and conquer adjoining nations, then their government is no more called thievish, but graced with the eminent name of a kingdom, given and gotten, not because they have left their practice, but now because they may use them without danger of law.<sup>73</sup>

Just as Augustine, citing Alexander the Great, effaces the distinction between the emperor and the thief, so Shakespeare counterpoints Henry's band of brothers with a band of thieves, exposing the basis of communal cooperation rooted in egotism and material ambition.

Henry's vision of brothers reconciled and redeemed from obscurity by the power of the historiographic record "From this day to the ending of the world" (IV.iii.58) informs time with a comedic closure and implicitly anticipates the redemption of history. Analogy becomes identity as English history, rewritten in the form of redemptive history, becomes one with Christian history. Shakespeare, however, questions the relationship between the record of history and the record of eternity, creating alternative "endings" which reformulate the story of Henry's reign. Henry's identification of secular history with the history of the heavenly city and his depiction of the state as a redemptive agency is countered by Williams' anticipation of "the latter day":

But if the cause be not good, the King himself hath a heavy reckoning to make, when all those legs and arms and heads, chopp'd off in battle, shall join together at the latter day

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<sup>73</sup> Augustine, 1:115.

and cry all, "We died at such a place"—some swearing, some crying for a surgeon, some upon their wives left poor behind them, some upon debts they owe, some upon their children rawly left. I am afeard there are few die well that die in battle; for how can they charitably dispose of anything, when blood is their argument? (IV.i.133–42)

In this vision of the Last Judgment, Shakespeare recreates the alternative ending of Christian history; the comedic apotheosis of the saints is rewritten as the tragedy of damnation. If the play's presentation of the body politic in a language of unanimity exemplified by "one consent" (I.ii.181, 206; II.ii.22–23), "all," (II.pro.1), "one" (I.ii.208–9, 212; V.ii.357–58) and in images of harmony—the beehive (I.ii.187–204) and the happy band of brothers—insistently encodes its story as a comedy, the shocking image of dismembered body parts, brutally dis severed, signals a contending version of Henry's seamless story of "one consent." In this apocalyptic anticipation of the "heavy reckoning" due to men engaged in amoral conquest, the earthly city is envisioned as a dis severed body and the material basis of its unity is disclosed. Contrasting the "argument" or sign which identifies men who live and die by violence—blood—with the mark of the heavenly city—charity—Williams calls into doubt the sanctification of a band of brothers united not by justice, but by blood. Williams's severing of the history of conquest from the history of the heavenly city echoes Augustine's division between the party of Cain and the party of Abel: "that boasts of ambitious conquerors led by the lust of sovereignty: in this all serve each other in charity...."<sup>74</sup> Ironically, Williams's anticipation of time's ending subverts the transcendent implications of Henry's anticipation of a temporal apotheosis. It also subjects Henry himself to the "heavy reckoning" which he invokes in condemning his fraternal enemies in his own drama of sin and judgment.

The demythologized accounts of the band of brothers as a confederacy of thieves and an assembly of severed body parts figure forth an alternative story, reiterating the generic tensions which give shape to *Henry V*. Shakespeare discloses the artifices—both political

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<sup>74</sup> Augustine, 2:59.

and aesthetic—which fabricate a vision of unanimity. He thus reveals the fictive character of the comedic closure created by Henry's rewriting of the Southampton plot as a triumphant Last Judgment and his fashioning of the story of Agincourt as its redemptive counterpart. The comedic mode is sustained by a conjuring effort expressed in pleas, promises and acts of imagination. These voices deny, rebuke or transcend the reverse story—history as an account of fraternal enmity. Ironically, these voices at once demystify the English historiographic assumption that foreign conquest reflects or enhances national unity.<sup>75</sup> For example, Bardolph's plea for reconciliation between Pistol and Nym, "Come, shall I make you two friends? We must to France together" (II.i.90–93), juxtaposed with the tragic alternative—"knives to cut one another's throats"—is echoed by Bates's plea, "Be friends, you English fools, be friends" (IV.i.219). Henry's promise of eternal brotherhood is adumbrated by the material vision of Pistol's promise to Nym. Just as his assurance that "friendship shall combine, and brotherhood" (II.i.109) anticipates the literal profits of that union, so Henry's promises serve his imperial ambitions. Not only do the characters persuade one another, but the Chorus in a language of unanimity ("all," "every," "solely" [II.pro.1–4]) also directs us in the romantic project of imagining the unity of "English purposes" (II.pro.15). Although the Chorus enjoins the audience to accept its poetic figuration as history, "submitting the shows of things to the desires of the mind,"<sup>76</sup> the conjuring mode discloses that we are witnessing not history itself but the ceremonial fashioning of an historical text.

While the interior play, Henry's play, imitates the comedic form

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<sup>75</sup> Dollimore and Sinfield, who argue that the play is not "'about' unity" but about insurrection (216), contend that the notion that foreign wars distract from internal conflict and enforce unity is demystified (215–18). If so, Shakespeare is implicitly challenging an assumption which is reiterated (and sometimes questioned) in English historiography.

<sup>76</sup> Sir Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding, R. L. Ellis, and D. D. Heath, 3 vols. (Philadelphia, 1842), 1:192. The play's comedic or romantic enactment of an idealized version of brotherly reconciliation and its ceremonial exorcising of the tragic witness of fact recalls Bacon's distinction between poetry and history, in which poetry idealizes by "submitting the shows of things to the desires of the mind," while history, like reason, "doth buckle and bow the mind unto the nature of things."



of redemptive history, all but overpowering dissenting voices which, like that of Williams, invoke the tragedy of damnation, a third "ending" is proposed in the play's epilogue. Recalling the historical continuum, signaled by references to the succession and the future, Shakespeare reframes the past. The Chorus supplants the ending of Henry's story with the record of recurring civil violence. One becomes "many" (Epi.11, 12) as Henry's brothers vie for control of the realm and its young heir.<sup>77</sup> Shakespeare counters a comedic myth of transcendence with a secular vision of history similar to Geoffrey of Monmouth's ironic or realistic emplotment of British history, in which fraternal enmity and reconciliation are part of a continuous and inescapable cycle. Distancing history's amoral conflicts and its temporary and pragmatic reconciliations from the history of the heavenly city, Shakespeare represents this cyclical interplay of tragic and comedic scenarios as a parodic counterfeit of the tragicomic form of redemptive history.

Shakespeare, then, explores the generic configurations of the past by reenacting in alternative emplotments the interplay of fraternal strife and brotherly reconciliation, a familiar model for medieval drama and English historiography. The discourse of *Henry V* is, in fact, marked by "a dialectical tension" between generic models. Such a tension, as Hayden White argues, is the mark of "the element of critical self-consciousness present in any historian of recognizably classical stature."<sup>78</sup> Shakespeare dramatizes Henry's own effort to rewrite history, exorcising the tragic aspects of the mythic configuration of English historiography and institutionalizing the divine comedy of brotherly reconciliation. The play itself presents an ironic view of history's comedies and tragedies. Like an anamorphic image, brotherhood figures forth the "alternative emplotments" which endow a set of historical events, which in themselves have no story, with "all the possible meanings" accessible to Shakespeare's audience.<sup>79</sup> The comedy or romance of brotherly reconciliation is sustained by the non-mimetic strategies of the Chorus and of Henry's moral emplotment, designed to evoke what should or might have

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<sup>77</sup> Dollimore and Sinfield, 220.

<sup>78</sup> White, "Historical Text," 94.

<sup>79</sup> White, "Historical Text," 84, 92.



been. Nevertheless, neither moral exhortation nor appeals to the imagination succeed in exorcising the tragedy of fraternal enmity which reappears in mimetic representation of violated brotherhood. Shakespeare, thus, invokes generic patterns common to English historiography to recreate history's shifting perspectives and to test those formulations against the witness of the record.

A. Elizabeth Ross

## Hand-me-Down-Heroics: Shakespeare's Retrospective of Popular Elizabethan Heroical Drama in *Henry V*

Trying to account for the particular way in which *Henry V*<sup>1</sup> imitates *Tamburlaine the Great*<sup>2</sup> (especially *Part One*), James Shapiro argues that Shakespeare writes *Henry V*, "through, or rather over *Tamburlaine*."<sup>3</sup> The formulation is apt, because it seems to get at the particular focus *Tamburlaine* provides for the audience interpreting the play, and it suggests that the influence of *Tamburlaine* works as a background for a larger evaluation of heroism. Shakespeare writes *Henry V* "through" *Tamburlaine* by including choruses which encourage his audience to imagine Henry as a Tamburlainian conqueror, to adopt the "aspiring mind" of such a hero, and to

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<sup>1</sup> All citations from Shakespeare's *Henry V* come from David Bevington, ed., *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Glenview, Ill.: Scott Foresman Co., 1980).

<sup>2</sup> All citations from Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great, Parts One and Two* come from Una Ellis Fermor, ed. *Tamburlaine the Great in two parts* (London: Gordian Press, 1964). Throughout my text I will abbreviate the full title of Marlowe's plays.

<sup>3</sup> James Shapiro, "Revisiting *Tamburlaine: Henry V* as Shakespeare's Belated Armada Play," *Criticism* 31 (1987): 360.

anticipate the "swelling" effects of bombastic rhetoric and spectacle of Marlowe's plays. He "writes over" *Tamburlaine* by recontextualizing the Tamburlainian ethos of the conqueror in the context of a Christian commonwealth;<sup>4</sup> he creates parallels between scenes and characters which he expects his audience to coordinate, and he contrasts aristocratic and populist genres which he expects his audience to evaluate. In effect, Shakespeare makes his audience's interpretation of Henry V a complex hermeneutical discovery. The experience of the play approximates the experience of reconstructing the character of the king through the literary and historical frames of Elizabethan culture; it makes the audience self-conscious about its preconceptions about the character of Henry V. Theatrically, the play adjusts the audience's view of the king in a way which resembles the technique of montage in film; it makes them continue to refocus their interpretation of Henry. They come to achieve a critical distance from the official historical and dramatic versions of the king whom Halle denominated "the Mirror of all Christian Kings."<sup>5</sup>

The relation of *Tamburlaine* to *Henry V*, then, is an interesting case study of generic influence. It represents the relation of a generic innovation to the culmination of its tradition. It is important to emphasize, however, that Shakespeare does not merely draw on *Tamburlaine* as a source; he writes his play in the Tamburlainian kind in order to question the literary ideal taken up as a cultural model. Similarly, he does not confine his evaluation of heroic conceptions to the Tamburlainian tradition;<sup>6</sup> he tests the Tamburlainian against the populist fictions of the heroic ballad play. Shakespeare writes *Henry V* as an evaluation of the range of literary conceptions of the hero available in Elizabethan culture. Faced with the prospect of dramatizing the "famous victor of Agincourt," he looks back

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<sup>4</sup> For an Elizabethan discussion of the exemplary history in the commonwealth context, see Thomas Elyot, *The Boke Named the Governor*, ed. Foster Watson (London: J. M. Dent and Co., 1907), 41-45.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Halle, *The Union of the Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York* (Menston: Scolar Press, 1970), 114.

<sup>6</sup> For a good discussion of Tamburlainian revisions, see Peter Berek, "Tamburlaine's Weak Sons: Imitation as Interpretation Before 1593" *Renaissance Drama* 13 (1982): 55-82. I disagree with Berek, however, for I think that Shakespeare does use the stage to dispute previous formulations of literary heroics.

through the Tamburlainian tradition as well as through his own efforts in heroic representation. Indeed, *Henry V* acts as a palinode to the heroic dramatization of his earlier work. In contrast to his revision of *Tamburlaine* in *The First Part of King Henry VI*, which adapted the Tamburlainian idiom to a chivalric ethos,<sup>7</sup> and his *First and Second Part of King Henry IV*, which adapted the ballad conception of *The Famous Victories of Henry V* for his characterization of the populist Hal, in *Henry V* Shakespeare combines both of these traditions in order to evaluate their limitations as models of heroism in the context of the commonwealth.

Like the imitations of *Tamburlaine* (especially *The Battle of Alacazar*) which use a chorus to frame the audience's response to the historical characters they describe, Shakespeare's chorus anticipates the audience's expectations to be presented with an exemplary portrait of Henry V's glorious career. The opening chorus is a synthesis of imagery and bombastic rhetoric derived from a variety of sources of heroic representation. It is implicitly grounded on the panegyrical accounts of Tudor historians and uses imagery which resembles an aristocratic *impresa* or the description of the god of war in the *The Mirror for Magistrates*.<sup>8</sup> Henry is depicted in heraldic relief as a Mars who submits "famine, sword, and fire" as the hounds of war "leash'd" in and "crouch[ing]" for employment (*Henry V*, I.pro.8). Similarly, the conflict the audience is encouraged to imagine is elevated to epic proportions which recall Marlowe's depiction of *Tamburlaine* as a conqueror of immeasurable kingdoms. Henry's conflict of nations is described synecdochically in terms of a metamorphosed landscape as the Chorus enjoins the audience to

Suppose within the girdle of these walls  
Are now confin'd two mighty monarchies  
Whose high uprear'd and abutting fronts  
The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder.

(I.pro.19-22)

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<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the way in which Shakespeare adapts the Tamburlainian to a chivalric ethos, see David Riggs, *Shakespeare's Heroical Histories: Henry VI and its Literary Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), 27.

<sup>8</sup> See the description of the god of war in William Baldwin, *The Mirror for Magistrates*, ed. L. B. Campbell (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1938), 311-12.



The cliffs of Dover and Calais are described as two hostile animals lashing out at one another in unrestrainable and violent aggression. The imagery resembles the illustration of the fierce animals in Elizabethan cartography; the aggression of France and England is pictured in heraldic or totemic representation which elevates the conflict to the level of epic or myth.

It is important that the Chorus calls attention to his attempt to find a suitably fiery rhetoric to figure forth the famous English conqueror. The opening chorus seems written in response to Marlowe's prologue to *Tamburlaine Part One*. Just as Marlowe's prologue calls attention to the "high astounding terms" of his conquering hero, so Shakespeare's opening chorus calls attention to the rhetoric he will need to create such a lofty portrait. He invokes the Muse of Fire and hopes to attain a rhetorical style which will "ascend / The brightest heaven of invention!" (I.pro.1-2). He adopts the Tamburlainian rhetorical "terms" by using Marlowe's strategy of piling up appositional phrases to give vigor and momentum to his invocation. But the difference between Marlowe's prologue and Shakespeare's opening chorus is important. Marlowe challenges his audience to be persuaded by his hero's rhetoric while Shakespeare's Chorus assumes that they will applaud such a heroic idiom, but fears that he may not be able to provide it.

From the outset of the play, then, the Chorus responds to what he thinks the audience considers appropriate to his subject. Though he aspires to satisfy their expectations, he doubts his ability to encompass such a majestic theme within the humble dimensions of the "wooden O" (I.pro.13). He denies that his is a fiery muse, characterizes his spirit as unraised, and confesses that his talents are not capable of conjuring up a lofty portrait. The Chorus's apology and his intimate address to the audience modulate into an idiom which resembles that of the expostulator of the native morality tradition:

But pardon, gentles all,  
The flat unraised spirits that hath dared  
On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth  
So great an object. (I.pro.8-11)

The apology is an elaborate parenthetical construction. It comes

between the percussive rhythms of the opening apostrophe and the exhortations to the audience in the imperatives that follow—"Suppose . . . Piece Out . . . Think . . ." (I.pro.19-25)—that resume the epic mood. The shifting focus of the opening Chorus from inspiration to doubt reflects a central strategy of the play. In contrast to Marlowe's hortatory introduction challenging his audience to "applaud [Tamburlaine's] fortunes as they please" (*Tamburlaine Part One*, I.pro.8), Shakespeare's Chorus characterizes himself as "prologue-like" and rather quietly asks for his audience's "humble patience" (I.pro.33) in the presentation of his subject. His bidding them, "Gently to hear, kindly to judge, our play" (I.pro.34) is hardly the vigorous challenge of Marlowe's bombastic prologue. Ultimately, this is because the play will develop as a counter-challenge to the epic effects and will encourage more humble values. As the fifth chorus will point out, the play is continually interrupting the full development of the bombastic style; it is continually "Mangling by starts the full course of [his hero's] glory" (V.epi.4).

Shakespeare structures the play to make the audience contrast the Chorus's version with the more realistic context of the dramatic action. Indeed, the play seems written to contradict those justifications of the history play, like Nashe's *Pierce Penniless* (1592)<sup>9</sup> and Heywood's *Apology for Actors* (1609)<sup>10</sup> which describe the effect of heroic drama as the inspiration to impersonate or emulate the qualities of great men. Shakespeare makes the audience confront their enthusiasm for heroic aspiration by complicating the idealized perspective of the Chorus in the successive scenes. The first chorus encourages the audience to imagine Henry as an epic hero, but this aspiration is deflated by the "discovery" of the politic causes of war. In the discussion between the Archbishop and Ely about the need to avert the bill brought by the Commons, we are offered a view of the backroom manipulations of duplicitous clerics contemplating strategy. Similarly, the second chorus encourages the audience to admire the "aspiring minds" of Englishmen preparing for war. He exhorts

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas Nashe, "Pierce Penniless" in *The Collected Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. R. B. McKerrow, repr. with supplementary notes by F. P. Wilson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), 1:212.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Riggs, 7, from Thomas Heywood's *The Apology for Actors*.

them to imagine the marshalling of forces at Southampton and suggests the alacrity with which all Englishmen are arming in a united effort and a common cause. Considered in a positive light, the pictorial image of a "sword, from hilts unto the point" impaled with "crowns imperial" (II.pro.9-10), creates associations with the Tamburlainian aspiration to be the conqueror of kingdoms and perhaps even with the banqueting scene in *Tamburlaine*, where Tamburlaine offers his generals crowns as cates. However, the image takes on sinister associations as it is directly related to Henry's former Eastcheap companions turning their attention to the prospect of plunder in France and to the dissimulating traitors who have compacted an alliance against Henry with the French.

*Henry V* develops ironic perspectives between the optimistic version of the chorus and the successive scenes in a manner which resembles the way Marlowe creates contradictions between Tamburlaine's heroic rhetoric and his stage spectacles. In *Tamburlaine Part One* the audience learns to see behind Tamburlaine's Herculean eloquence when Tamburlaine commands Techelles to expose the treasure they have accumulated in battle as a way of persuading Theridamas to his side. The stage spectacle betrays that Tamburlaine's real persuasiveness derives not from his rhetoric, as Theridamas's praise of his "working words" suggests, but from the promise of plunder he holds out to the soldiers who would join him. In a similar way, the ambiguities in the Chorus's descriptions in *Henry V* work against the positive interpretation the Chorus wishes to promote. He describes all Englishmen in a panegyric flourish which suggests that "honor's thought / Reigns solely in the breast of every man" (II.pro.3-4), and characterizes the English in an epic fanfare, as "English Mercuries" (II.pro.7). However, while he suggests that the English are votaries of Mercury in his capacity as the messenger God who speeds them on their way to France "with winged heels" (II.pro.7), the dramatic strategy focuses attention on the possibility that the English follow Mercury in his capacity as the god of tricksters and thieves.

Shakespeare offers his audience alternate ways of interpreting his imagery. The audience can interpret the sword image emblematically as the sword in Justicia's hand, but when it is associated with the treacherous nobles Scroop, Grey, and Cambridge, and the Eastcheap



companions, it serves to coordinate the ignoble and avaricious aspirations of aristocrats and the base-born in Henry's commonwealth. It comes to represent the danger of applying the Tamburlainian aspiration literally in the commonwealth. In its positive aspect, it represents the Christian king's duty to use his secular sword against infidels; however, such an aristocratic gloss of war as the desire to achieve fame and honor for the nation is denied by these false conspirators. The image of a diminutive England as a bastion of the virtuous, a "Model. . . / Like little body with a mighty heart" (II.pro.16-17), seems hopelessly romantic when the Chorus must admit the falseness of the hearts of the king's closest noble companions.

When it is applied against Henry's former tavern companions, Pistol, Nym, and Bardolph, it defines the literal interpretation of Tamburlainian aspiration as a justification for violence. These base representatives of the commonwealth turn the slightest hint of an insult into an excuse for defending their honor. The farcical repetition of thrusting and sheathing, Nym's cryptic and ominous fixation with "throats" and "knives" (II.pro.20-21), and Pistol and Bardolph's mock encounter premised on a pun on "sword" or "s'word" (II.i.99-101) as an oath, keep the sword image in its dangerous aspect continually before the audience. Ultimately, the two Eastcheap scenes are expressionistic; they serve to create a feeling of the volatility of a commonwealth composed of debased versions of the Tamburlainian ideal of "aspiring minds." Thus, the Chorus's appeal to the patriotism of the audience in the laudatory picture of Englishmen is complicated when the description is put in apposition to the scenes which follow. The Chorus's exclamatory apostrophe, "What mightst thou do, that honor would thee do, / Were all thy children kind and natural!" (II.pro.18-19) is couched in the subjunctive. When the Chorus's dreamlike wish is juxtaposed against the indicative facts, it works as a rhetorical question which challenges its audience and makes them search out their own aspirations.

Similarly, the third chorus elicits the audience's expectations for the violent and noisy effects of a Tamburlainian spectacle, but then it refuses to allow these feelings to be maintained. At first, the Chorus encourages the audience to participate in imagining a siege. It is the most enthusiastic exhortation of the audience in the play as it encourages them to "Work, work your thoughts" (III.pro.25) and



to "follow, follow! / Grapple your minds to sternage of this navy" (III.pro.17-18). The momentum of the chorus is carried over in Henry's address to his soldiers at Harfleur and his appeal elicits the audience's adrenaline in his graphic description of the humors the soldiers must unleash in preparation for war. The seven short scenes that follow, however, serve to interrupt and complicate the audience's response. As the velocity carried from scene to scene develops intensity, Shakespeare deflates the audience's excitement and makes them distance themselves from the action: he does not allow them to identify themselves with the soldiers. Directly following Henry's exhortation of his men, he focuses on the comedy of the cowardly Bardolph and his Eastcheap companions who run on stage as if impelled by Henry's oratory.

The scenes which follow the Chorus's exhortations give a close-up of the effects of applying the martial humors Henry has encouraged. The parallels are implicit, but the implications of the pattern focus the audience's attention on the human implications of heroic emulation. MacMorris, in his impatience to return to the battle, seems to be a short-hand sketch of the results of programming men for war. The quarrels between the Scotch, Welsh, and Irish soldiers serve to reflect the quarrels between Nym and Pistol in the second act, and within the overall context of Henry's war with France; and ultimately, these quarrels suggest the volatility of Henry's England which seems continually to be threatening to erupt into aggressive behavior. Henry's bloody threatening of the Governor of Harfleur is deliberately set against Katharine's "precious" language lesson and the contrast set up between Henry's brutality and Katharine's civility creates an implicit logic which makes the audience infer that the "blind and bloody soldier" (III.iii.34) will take her as the spoils of war if France is lost. Finally, the Dauphin's pride in his invocations of the god of war, and the scene in which Fluellen mistakes Pistol for a soldier as "magnanimous as Agamemnon" (III.vi.6-7), makes Shakespeare's audience view the humors of war ironically; by the end of the act, they cannot avoid regretting their simplistic enthusiasm for war and recognizing that their enthusiasm is, in part, a lust for violence.

More than any play in Shakespeare's canon, then, *Henry V* enjoins the audience to contribute to the imaginative reconstruction

of his historical character. By adopting a humble persona and acknowledging a fledgling capacity from the beginning, the Chorus encourages the audience to contribute to the re-creation of Henry's character in heroic terms. He exhorts them to let the actors, as "ciphers to his great account, / [work] On [their] imaginary forces" (I.pro.17-18), and he makes them aware of their ability to carry the action through the "celerity ... of thought" (III.pro.2-3) from Southampton back and forth to France (prologues II, III, V). By calling attention to the rhetoric he needs to accomplish a heroic portrait, and by focusing on the importance of the audience's involvement, the Chorus makes the effort seem strained. The flexibility of the imagination to which the third chorus refers, comes to describe the effort which is needed to understand the literary, cultural, and topical parallels developed throughout the play. The theatricality to which the first chorus calls attention in the images of the theater as a "wooden O," and of the actors as "ciphers," comes to take on different connotations as the audience becomes suspicious of his view: the treatment of Henry by the Chorus comes to seem like a procrustean effort directed at producing an English parallel to classical and literary heroes. The Chorus's constant appeals to the audience are meant to keep them imagining Henry according to heroic ideals, but gradually the audience comes to wonder whether they have been urged to play a part in idealizing Henry and ignoring the subtleties of history.

By setting the Chorus's version apart from the dramatic action and then developing disparities between the Chorus's interpretation and the dramatic action, Shakespeare makes his audience experience the tendentiousness of the Chorus's heroical history; the audience comes to feel that the Chorus's view is selective and that his inclination to outline Henry's exemplary acts is an aristocratic focus which inhibits a complex understanding of the effects of Henry's war for all members of his commonwealth. As the play proceeds, the audience begins to realize that the Chorus's vision is myopic: as his obliviousness to Henry's tavern companions suggests, he does not seem to acknowledge the base-born in Henry's commonwealth; in the fourth act, he completely distorts the actual reasons that Henry, in the night scene, goes among his men. In inventing this scene, Shakespeare levels a challenge at the aristocratic heroic literature from a

popular perspective; the heroic conception of war is challenged, alongside the king, in the night scene which evaluates his justifications for promoting war.

If the heroic account Shakespeare provides in the chorus is modeled on the example of the heroic ethos of *Tamburlaine* and its progeny, then the qualifications to the Chorus's view that the audience comes to desire are implicitly a revision of the Tamburlainian heroic ethos. If Shakespeare meant his audience to "hear" the Chorus's heroic admiration as a parallel to *Tamburlaine*, and then contradict this view with a consideration of the civic values the dramatic action makes them entertain, this association remains, nevertheless, an implicit revision. In contrast, Shakespeare's revision of the Tamburlainian idiom is explicit; the speeches of Henry and Pistol are an analysis of the Tamburlainian idiom. In order to make the audience evaluate the possibility of using "right rhetoric," Shakespeare contrasts Henry's serious use of the Tamburlainian idiom with Pistol's imitation of its sheer bombast.

Pistol is a deliberate parody of the Tamburlainian conqueror reduced to a dramatic cliché; his bombastic swaggering is premised on Tamburlaine's "threatening the world" (*Tamburlaine Part One*, pro.5); his various appeals to Fortune cannot but remind an audience of Tamburlaine's grand boast that he "holds the Fates bound fast in iron chains" (*Tamburlaine Part One*, I.ii.173). Pistol makes explicit what Marlowe had only left implicit: that his intention in "play[ing] the Tamburlaine"<sup>11</sup> is only to amass plunder. He is, perhaps, a side-long glance at the various tyrants like Amurath and Mully Mahomet who had spouted the Senecan end of Tamburlaine's bombastic rant in Tamburlainian imitations, but he is surely a literal exaggeration of the Tamburlainian taken as an ideal of emulation. This is especially evident when Henry's mercy is contrasted to Pistol's mockery show of mercy to the "French Soldier." The parallel causes the audience to "mind true things by what their mock'ries be" (IV.pro.53).

Shakespeare creates an ambivalence toward Henry which makes the audience respond to him differently in various scenes. He allows his audience to become cynical about Henry's rhetoric and to see his

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted from *Histriomastix* in Joel Altman, "Vile Participation: The Amplification of Violence in the Theatre of *Henry V*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42 (1991): 15.



war as an aristocratic version of Pistol's quest for plunder in France when he makes them hear an equivalence in Henry's couplet, "Cheerly to sea! The signs of war advance! / No king of England if not king of France!" (II.ii.192-93), and Pistol's "Let us to France like horse-leeches, my boys, / To suck, to suck, the very blood to suck!" (II.iii.54-55), but then he distinguishes Henry's seriousness from Pistol's blatant opportunism. As his name suggests, Pistol is merely a "slander . . . of the age" (III.vi.82) who adopts the Tamburlainian style to pump up his swaggering, while Henry is a kind of Cicero-nian "true orator" who fashions his rhetoric with the good of the souls of his citizens as his goal. Though Henry adopts the Tamburlainian for his exhortation, resolution, and threatening speeches, he "plays the Tamburlaine," it seems, only reluctantly; it is only one of the idioms he has at his command. While he does use the inflationary idiom, Shakespeare builds in retrospective justifications which explain his pragmatic reasons for its use.

Ultimately, Shakespeare's evaluation of rhetoric is based on Marlowe's, but while Marlowe's irony exposes Tamburlaine's oratory as mere dissimulation and self-promotion, Shakespeare considers the cases in which the king as a good governor must use such inflationary language to persuade his audience of soldiers. Henry adopts the Tamburlainian idiom in set pieces calculated to move his auditors to admiration, emulation, and commiseration, but his reasons for so doing are calculated against other goals. In the opening scenes with the clerics, Henry's rhetoric parallels Tamburlaine's, threatening, exhortation, and resolution speeches, but Shakespeare reorients the context so that Henry's bombastic idiom seems to have been elicited by the clerics rather than spoken at his own instigation. Further, even as Henry adopts the idiom he transforms it as a vehicle which insinuates meanings which are homiletic, accusatory, or didactic. While the Archbishop mythologizes Henry's transformation by making it analogous to a religious conversion or to Hercules' labor of cleaning the Augean stables, Henry's responses to the Archbishop reveal his ability to see through the Archbishop's manipulations and to use them for his own ends.

The whole discussion of the claim to France reveals Henry's masterful orchestration of a dramatically climactic sequence of speeches. Tamburlaine "conjures" his audience to dream as he does



by promising them treasure and glory; Henry's "conjunction" puts the Archbishop under an oath to tell the truth. Henry's strategy shows the king's shrewd "prevention" (I.i.22). He exhorts the Archbishop to furnish the arguments for his claim to France and so lays the responsibility of the war, at least publicly, to the Archbishop's justifications. Having received his counselors' appeals to "Go . . . to your great-grandsire's tomb" (I.ii.103) and imitate such victorious conquests, Henry introduces a caveat into the resounding echo of voices supporting and exhorting him to broach war. The sequence has the feel of a debate, but in fact the atmosphere of dialectical give-and-take is completely lacking. By establishing a mood of hesitant and unfirm resolve and questioning his cause and claim, Henry moves his counselors to exhort him. Throughout the sequence, Henry provides a model of sober and cautious contemplation in contrast to the fervent and highly pitched enthusiasm of his counselors. Throughout the sequence, his is the dissenting voice. He orchestrates the sequence so that he remains the passive and undecided member who needs to be convinced by the persuasions of his fellows.

When Henry comes to assert his resolve, he fashions a speech modeled on Tamburlaine's resolution speeches which is designed in response to his counselors' expectations of a heroic conqueror. Henry picks up the terms of their exhortations to "Look back into [his] mighty ancestors" (I.ii.101) and to remember the glorious victories which provided a chronicle "as rich with praise / As is the ooze and bottom of the sea / With sunken wrack and sumless treasuries" (I.ii.163-65). Henry's resolution speech picks up the particularly pagan elements of the Archbishop's praises. Fame is given as the end of his heroic aspirations. The challenge Henry sets himself is to achieve immortality in stone or to "lay these bones in an unworthy urn, / Tombless, with no remembrance over them" (I.ii.228-29). Henry adjusts his words to the expectations of his auditors. He takes up the imagery of his counselors when he refers parenthetically to the "noble sinews of our power," (I.ii.223) for as Exeter and Canterbury had so fervently insisted on the functioning of the parts under the direction of one arm, so Henry's metaphor makes the nobles the energizing force supporting his resolution. Similarly, Henry's speech is premised on the counselors' exhortation to Henry to look back at the chronicles rich in praise of his ances-

tors. His speech assures them that he will provide the material for a chronicle praising his victorious acts:

Either our history shall with full mouth  
 Speak freely of our acts, or else our grave,  
 Like Turkish mute, shall have a tongueless mouth,  
 Not worship'd with a waxen epitaph. (I.ii.230–33)

That the phrase “Ruling in large and ample empery” (I.ii.226) is not unlike the Archbishop’s description of the emperor of the bees, “Who busied in his majesty surveys / The singing masons . . . / The civil citizens . . . [and] / The poor mechanic porters” (I.ii.197), shows how Henry models his response on the Archbishop’s speech; Henry reiterates the Archbishop’s bee analogy and its fairy-tale atmosphere, imagining himself the Emperor of all he surveys. Henry’s vision of “ruling in large and ample empery” is also, however, reminiscent of Tamburlaine’s persuasion of Theridamas where he imagines that they will be “lords of all the lake” (*Tamburlaine Part One*, I.ii.195). Importantly, Henry’s resolution speech shows how Shakespeare builds Henry’s speeches as a concentration of the elements of the Tamburlainian heroic ethos and idiom. Henry’s threatening and his promise of empery are based on Tamburlaine’s threatening and his mythological comparisons, and his funeral imagery recalls Tamburlaine’s spectacle of Zenocrate’s tomb.<sup>12</sup> His counselors’ exhortations are directed at coordinating him with a line of worthies just as Tamburlaine had associated himself with Cyrus and Xerxes—and indirectly—as Elizabethan noblemen like Leicester and Essex were fashioning themselves on classical and literary worthies. Interestingly, Henry’s whole resolution speech is built upon his self-conscious anticipation of the history that will be written about him and which will assure his fame as a conqueror just as history has documented the lives of other heroic exemplars and their *actes*.

Shakespeare’s reorganization of the events as they were presented in the chronicles suggests that his intention was to emphasize the king’s powers of rhetorical persuasion and to place his speeches in relief. But Shakespeare’s foregrounding of Henry’s speeches serves a

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<sup>12</sup> For a summary of the ways in which Tamburlainian imitators copied the stage spectacles with funeral cars and cages for captive kings, see Shapiro, n. 21.

purpose different from the relief Marlowe creates between Tamburlaine's words and his deeds. Marlowe's ironic perspective is based on a cynical evaluation of rhetoric as deception and dissimulation. Even though he has just scorned the use of rhetoric as a means of winning battles, the dramatic action shows Tamburlaine's "real persuasions" of Theridamas to be the treasure he displays as a bribe to the Persians as they approach him. Similarly, after he has just finished creating his "passionate persuasion" of Zenocrate<sup>13</sup> in the guise of a shepherd, his one-line aside, admitting that "women must be flattered" (I.ii.107) makes his self-conscious projection or cultivation of an image apparent. When he covers up this bald admission by protesting, "and this is [the woman] with whom I am in love" (*Tamburlaine Part One*, I.ii.108), the audience cannot but feel that his protestation is hollow, and that his rhetoric is simply self-serving opportunism. For all his protestations, Tamburlaine is still in the position of the highway robber when he meets Zenocrate. The basic motive to his rhetorical elaborations is that he needs the Princess's treasure as the collateral which will win him soldiers, and he needs her prestige to lend an aura of legitimacy to his conquests. The irony created between Tamburlaine's rhetoric and the dramatic action reveals him to be a "type" of confidence man not unlike such Italian tyrants as Cosimo and Lorenzo de Medici, who were no doubt known to Marlowe as the master-manipulators of Renaissance art as propaganda.

In Henry's threatening speech addressed to the Dauphin, Shakespeare shows the king's self-conscious deployment of rhetoric, not as a means of persuading his audience of his potential to make good on his promises for glory and riches, but rather as a tool of rebuke and chastisement. Henry counters the Dauphin's insinuations that he is a "morris" (II.iv.25) king and reworks the Dauphin's puerile "heroic" challenge. His vituperative attack on the Dauphin's insult is motivated by the assumption that the aspiration for personal glory is not a sufficient motivation for war; in contrast to the chivalric

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<sup>13</sup> This hortatory style resembles the rhetoric of Marlowe's "A Passionate Shepherd to his Love," and it is best exemplified by the passage which begins "Disdains Zenocrate to live with me?" (I.ii.82-104). The Marlovian wooing rhetoric is refocused in a plain style wooing of Kate at the end of the play.



challenges in *1 Henry IV*, where Shakespeare paired off Hal and Hotspur in a contest of chivalry, Shakespeare avoids such a contest in *Henry V*. He reduces the sense that the cause of war is the personal vengeance of a chivalric challenge between Henry and the Dauphin.<sup>14</sup> Shakespeare's reordering of the chronicle narrative serves to justify the fierce indignation with which Henry speaks. His reply, "We hope to make the sender blush at it," (I.ii.299) to Exeter's commendation, "This was a merry message," (I.ii.298) secures the focus on Henry's calculated control of his effect. Henry's one-liner is not unlike Tamburlaine's admission that he uses flattery to persuade Zenocrate to his side. The shift of mood from violent invective to sober judgment and calm suggests the premeditation with which Henry speaks. Shakespeare shows Henry using rhetoric to gain certain ends; his is not the unleashing of passion, violent aggression, or personal vengeance. Directed to the Dauphin's flippant estimation that he is a morris king fit for a May-day revel, the king turns the Dauphin's insulting gift of tennis balls, metaphorically, into the gunstones of war:

And tell the pleasant Prince this mock of his  
 Hath turn'd his balls to gun-stones, and his soul  
 Shall stand sore charged for the wasteful vengeance  
 That shall fly from them; for many a thousand widows  
 Shall this his mock mock out of their dear husbands,  
 Mock mothers from their sons, mock castles down;  
 Ay, some are yet ungotten and unborn  
 That shall have cause to curse the Dauphin's scorn.  
 (I.ii.281-88)

The king's speech is carefully calculated to shame the Dauphin and to prove his own high seriousness. Henry's conceit and his threatening are balanced with a concern to illustrate the consequences of war and to denigrate the Dauphin's scornful and condescending appraisal of his public person in favor of his former private self. The speech is tailored to the arrogant challenge of the Dauphin, proud of his physical prowess and eager to test his mettle without a thought to how his actions affect the lives of others who will perish as the result of his

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<sup>14</sup> Taylor discusses this issue in his introduction to his edition, 27.



puerile one-upmanship and proud boasts. Rather than an overture to war, Henry's rebuke is an object lesson on the consequences of war.

In a similar way, Henry's address to his soldiers at Harfleur is a conscious re-working of the Tamburlainian idiom. Where Tamburlaine exhorts his comrades by promises of plunder, fame, and glory, Henry's exhortations show his "care" for his soldiery, and not merely his cheer-leading them to battles which serve their mutual self-interest for aggrandizement. Henry's exhortations are a testimony to the brutality of war, but his rhetoric is meant to prepare his soldiers so that they are in the best condition to meet its challenges. In his address to his soldiers before the battle of Harfleur, he creates a catalogue of the senses and furnishes each item with a pictorial image meant to captivate the hearer in imitation of the image. His exhortation of his soldiers is a step-by-step enumeration of the process of brutalizing the mind to the task of war. The whole speech is framed in similitudes which make explicit Henry's consciousness that the spirit of war is an imitation of grossness. The verbs he uses emphasize the hardening of any sympathetic emotions. Henry conjures his soldiers to steel their minds, concentrate their attention, and "imitate the action of the tiger":

*Stiffen* the sinews, *summon up* the blood,  
*Disguise* fair nature with hard-favoured rage.  
 ... *lend* the eye a terrible aspect:  
 ... *set* the teeth and *stretch* the nostril wide,  
*Hold hard* the breath, and bend up every spirit  
 To his full height (III.i.6-17, italics added).

He asks for the unleashing of passions. Although the rhetoric is bombastic, it matches the needs of the situation: it shows Henry's understanding of the affective character of graphic visual imagery and percussive imperatives. The speech is a concentration of Tamburlainian bombastic imagery, but its effect is to make clear that the emotions of war call men to "be copy ... to men of grosser blood" (III.i.24).

Perhaps Shakespeare's most important reworking of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* comes in his address to the Governor of Harfleur. Henry's speech is premised on Tamburlaine's bloody threatening speeches at Damascus (in *Part One*) and Babylon (in *Part Two*) which relate him, iconographically, to Herod and his "Slaughter of the

Innocents." Marlowe's scenes are the climactic scenes of his plays; they contain his most explicit ironies, and they are his most serious challenge of the Elizabethan audience. They are, in effect, judgment scenes where the audience is witness to the horrific effects of Tamburlaine's bloody and "heroic" rhetoric. The realism of the stage spectacle makes the effects of Tamburlaine's cold-blooded resolutions directly apparent for the audience. The audience cannot rationalize Tamburlaine's commands as his heroic determination without re-visualizing the suffering of the slaughtered virgins killed by his command.

Shakespeare's reworking of Marlowe is a reversal of the audience's expectations of such a scene. While Tamburlaine only refers to the tyrannical Herod implicitly, he does carry out his threats of slaughter; Henry refers to Herod explicitly, but uses such threatening as a calculated bluff. Unlike the tents of red, white, and black that are Tamburlaine's visual emblems of threatening, Henry's threatening is verbal; he issues a warning to the Governor which projects a vision of the brutality of which he is capable. He envisages himself as "a soldier, / A name that in my thoughts becomes me best," (III.iii.4-5) and he warns that when he is resolved for war he will be intransigent:

The gates of mercy shall be all shut up,  
And the flesh'd soldier, rough and hard of heart,  
In liberty of bloody hand shall range  
With conscience wide as hell, mowing like grass  
Your fresh-fair virgins and your flow'ring infants.  
(III.iii.10-15)

In direct contrast to Tamburlaine, who is the object of the virgins' petitions of pity, Henry turns the responsibility on the citizens and the Governor of Harfleur themselves. Warned of such uncompromising retribution, he argues, the citizens will have no one to blame but themselves. They will have called such "justice" on themselves; they will have "forced" Henry to take on the character of "Herod's bloody-hunting slaughtermen":

Therefore, you men of Harfleur,  
Take pity of your town and of your people,  
Whiles yet my soldiers are in my command,  
Whiles yet the cool and temperate wind of grace  
O'erblows the filthy and contagious clouds

Of heady murder, spoil, and villainy.  
 If not, why, in a moment look to see  
 The blind and bloody soldier with foul hand  
 Defile the locks of your shrill-shrieking daughters,  
 Your fathers taken by the silver beards,  
 And their most reverend heads dashed to the walls,  
 Your naked infants spitted upon pikes,  
 Whiles the mad mothers with their howls confus'd  
 Do break the clouds, as did the wives of Jewry  
 At Herod's bloody-hunting slaughtermen.

(II.iii.27-41)

While Tamburlaine, at least on the surface, scorned the strategy of "playing the orator" as a means of winning battles, Henry V wins Harfleur directly as the result of his rhetoric. Interestingly, the whole tenor of the scene is a parallel to the policy of the orator whom Demosthenes praised (cited in the epistle from Wilson's *Arte of Rhetorique*)<sup>15</sup> for having won a siege with rhetoric and spared his soldiers as a result. That Henry's bloody rhetoric concentrates more on exaggerating Tamburlaine's threatening than carrying out his grisly spectacle, attests to Shakespeare's concern to recode his audience's connotations of the hero. If Henry's threatening is a calculated bluff such as the orator Demosthenes praised, the audience imagining themselves as the soldiers of Henry's war must see the justification of praising Henry's tactics rather than his bravado.

While Marlowe questions Tamburlaine's justice by building iconographical tableaux which contradict the hero's words, *Henry V* questions Henry's justice in terms of the conventions of populist drama. In the night scene before the battle of Agincourt, Shakespeare submits his king to the scrutiny of a plain-style dialogue with a common soldier. This scene is an encapsulation of the central argument of the play conceived in terms of the popular ballad play. Here Shakespeare plays out what the earlier second chorus anticipates: he "forces—perforce—a play" (II.pro.32). By inventing an inset scene which is an adaptation of the ballad conception of the hero, and by

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas Wilson, *The Arte of Rhetorique*, ed. G. H. Mair (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), Epistle to the Reader, sig. Aij.



making his king justify his cause within it, Shakespeare "forces" a play by inventing an extra-historical scene which brings the king to defend his cause and his responsibility for the war in the idiom of the common soldier. Importantly, Shakespeare reorients the audience's expectations for aristocratic exemplary fictions by focusing their attention on populist concerns. While Tamburlainian imitations had taken up the heroic play as an exemplum of those who would aspire, Shakespeare gives his most serious consideration to the demands of the lowest common soldier.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, many of the elements of the fourth act are "transformed" in terms of a populist ethos. The fourth chorus engages the audience to imagine Henry according to the populist conception of his character familiar from earlier interpretations like *The Famous Victories of Henry V*. It makes them remember Shakespeare's own version of Hal in *1 and 2 Henry IV*, which was in part modeled on the *Famous Victories*. It encourages the audience to expect to see the king amongst the commoners, for it describes him going throughout his camp heartening his soldiers by his own example. The "forms" of the scene are all borrowed from populist plays. As Anne Barton has made us see, the conventions of the king going amongst his troops is familiar from such plays as *George-a-Greene*, *Edward IV*, *Edward I*, and *King Leir*. Henry's own soliloquy is based on a popular topos of the Beggar King,<sup>17</sup> and his Crispin Crispian speech is an elaboration from popular hagiography which sacramentalized the comradeship of Henry's "band" of "brothers" (IV.pro.28, 33) and fashioned their unified action as the basis for the foundation of a national myth.

The fourth chorus shifts the audience's expectations from the heady exhortations to war of the opening choruses to the dreadful

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<sup>16</sup> The ballad convention was first discussed by F. Schelling in *The English Chronicle Play in the Age of Shakespeare*, (New York: Macmillan, 1902), and later in Anne Barton, "The King Disguised: Shakespeare's *Henry V* and the Comical History," in *The Triple Bond*, ed. J. Price (University Park: Pennsylvania Univ. Press, 1975), 107-17. Taylor's discussion of the influence of the night scene in Chapman's *Homer*, 52-58, is also an important explanation of influences on Shakespeare's conception.

<sup>17</sup> See James Black, "The Interlude of the Beggar and the King in *Richard II*," in *Pageantry in the Shakespearean Theater*, ed. David Bevington (Athens, Ga.: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1985), 104-13, and Willard Farnham, *The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy*, (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1936), 292. The illustration of the "Dance of Death" in Farnham shows the king holding hands with the beggar.



anticipation of the approaching battle of Agincourt. The Chorus assumes the direct address of the expostulator of the native tradition and addresses the audience of the play as though they were the soldiers under Henry's command.<sup>18</sup> The action of the night scene, the atmospheric description of the "tardy-gaited night," (IV.pro.20) the French who play at dice for Englishmen's souls, and the dreadful anticipation of the English at their "watchful fires" (IV.pro.23) create resonances of the Last Judgment.<sup>19</sup> The effect of the scene is to make the audience do what Henry enjoins his soldiers to do: to wash out the "motes" from their conscience, to feel the sense of "reck'ning" (IV.i.288) of the night before a dreaded battle, and to offer themselves up to God's Providence. Shakespeare makes the audience enact the preparation of a Christian soul under a commander who believes, or at least argues for the belief, that war is God's "beadle" (IV.i.168). While he does not make the audience secure in their estimation of the king's belief in a Providence which runs before the action, he offers them a view of the king's fears and his hopes for the salvation of his soldier's souls. He shows them Henry's concern, as Williams reminds him, of the "reck'ning" (IV.i.288) of the king who leads his men to such a war.<sup>20</sup>

The night scene is constructed as a survey of the classes of Henry's soldiery. The scene allows the audience to evaluate the "types" characterizing soldiers in Henry's commonwealth. It is a hermeneutical commentary on the versions of the heroic available in Shakespeare's England. It includes a great range of interpretations of heroism, and indirectly, a great range of interpretations of kingship. The king's encounters with his soldiery in the night scene concentrate the perspectives on Henry encompassed in the play. Pistol's farcical en-

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<sup>18</sup> See Shapiro and Altman for the historical details of how the audience would connect the marshalling of forces for the Irish wars to the marshalling of forces in Southampton: Altman, 366; Shapiro, n. 56.

<sup>19</sup> Shakespeare conflates many sources in his description, but Taylor is probably right in pointing out the importance of Chapman's translation of *The Iliad* in forming part of Shakespeare's conception of the scene, (52-55). Shakespeare adapts his source, however, to the Christian context of his fifteenth-century king.

<sup>20</sup> Williams's speech is remarkably similar, in some of its details, to Gascoigne's apocalyptic description of battle in "The Spoyle of Antwerpe," in *The Complete Works of George Gascoigne*, ed. John W. Cunliffe, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1910), 2:587-99.

counter with the king plays out the absurdities of his Tamburlainian interpretation of heroism; Fluellen's discussion of ancient camps, which Henry only overhears, reminds the audience of Fluellen's good-natured but rather gullible enthusiasm to interpret Henry from the measure of classical worthies; and the common soldiers' skepticism about Henry's cause and the persona he presents to his soldiers is a realistic account of the king which, no doubt, gives voice to the concerns of many of the ordinary Englishmen in the audience.

Williams is accorded a large measure of dignity in his opposition to the king. In contrast to the ballad plays which Anne Barton discusses, Shakespeare's play does not allow the conflict to be resolved romantically; rather, he allows Williams to stand his ground against the king. Where the ballad play would allow the common man to buffet the king mistaken as a fellow, and thus allow the audience to share in the pleasure of scapegoating their frustrations against the monarch, Shakespeare makes his king anticipate such an indignity and shows how a shrewd monarch manages to maintain his state at the same time that he allows the *status quo* a voice. He contradicts his audience's desire, habituated by populist convention, to subvert the normal hierarchy and to see a carnival world where lower classes can get on an equal footing with their superiors. Shakespeare's realistic treatment of the populist play convention makes his audience measure the king without the folklore commiseration. The gage is played out against Fluellen instead of the king, as the king's prerogative deems that it must be. Hierarchical order is preserved, but Shakespeare's king allows the common man to stand his ground and preserve his dignity. The audience are left to judge whether the comedy of the scene is justified, or whether Williams should remain indignant about the king's deception and his substitution of Fluellen to take up his answer to Williams's gage.

The night scene causes the audience to review Henry's justice in other scenes. They cannot but contrast his mercy to Williams, the severity of his treatment of the traitors, and his judgment of his former boon companion Bardolph. It allows the audience to applaud Henry for his "prevention" in the scene with the clerics, but makes them qualify their opinions with an acknowledgment of the sometimes cruel demands of maintaining order in a commonwealth which seems always ready to erupt into other quarrels. The night scene also

makes the audience consider the king's propaganda and his rhetoric in other scenes. Henry's dispute with Williams is one of a series of episodes in which Henry redeems his word and shows the right use of rhetoric. In his indictment of the noblemen who tried to entrap him in the second act, Henry accused Scroop of putting a "blot on all majestic speakers" by abusing the effects of creating "admiration" and "wonder" (II.ii.105, 107). In his soliloquy on ceremony, Henry disputes the efficacy of pomp for creating wonder, and finds ceremony incapable of commanding the health of the hearer. The unspoken layers of Henry's conscience make it difficult to glean his philosophy of rhetoric from his reservations about ceremony and pomp. However, the feeling that Henry has sacrificed his private self to the demands of the public is the effect of his accusations of ceremony as a false idol:

And what art thou, thou idol ceremony?  
 What kind of god art thou, that suffer'st more  
 Of mortal griefs than do thy worshipers?  
 What are thy rents? What are thy comings in?  
 O ceremony, show me but thy worth!  
 What is thy soul of adoration?  
 Art thou aught else but place, degree, and form,  
 Creating awe and fear in other men?  
 Wherein thou art less happy, being fear'd,  
 Than they in fearing. (IV.i.234-46)

Just as Socrates objected to the Gorgian figures of rhetoric which cannot command the health of the audience's soul, so Henry frames his speech as a diatribe against false rhetoric and spectacle.

Leaving the company of Williams and the other soldiers, Henry's thoughts remain on Williams's apocalyptic description of the responsibility the king has for the souls of his soldiers. Even though, in his argument with Williams, Henry asserts that "Every subject's duty is the King's, but every subject's soul is his / own," (IV.i.175-80). Shakespeare allows the audience to consider that Henry is unconvinced of it in his private conscience. Henry's analogy serves him as a moral object lesson for his soldiers to search out their own consciences and to wipe away any sins they have committed, in penitential preparation for their possible deaths on the morrow. The



advice Henry gives his soldiers, he takes himself. His soliloquy is rounded at its end by his own prayer to the "God of battles!" (IV.i.287). His petition to "Steel his soldiers' hearts" (IV.i.286) is given in the context of his own confession of the questionable foundations of his own legacy, and his confession seems to be an attestation of his penitential sincerity for the sins of his fathers. In contrast to Tamburlaine who boasts that he is the scourge of God, Henry's king reveals a tentativeness in his appeals to the god of war. His soliloquy exposes his concern to create a show of majestic grace, but the fears he reveals suggest that he is not secure in the Providence that he later credits with supporting him. Unlike Tamburlaine who uses rhetoric opportunistically and who asserts uncategorically that he is supported by Providence, Henry seems unsure of his cause but is intent on proving the worth of his utterance.

The audience's view of Henry is constantly kept ambivalent, but Shakespeare creates a sense that Henry uses kingly rhetoric as an essential tool of state. When he delivers his Crispin Crispian speech to encourage his soldiers, the audience cannot help but see it as the propaganda that Williams suspects. They carry over Williams's questioning of the king's morale-building parallels, for Henry's speech seems to be merely mythological propaganda. But in the context of the play, the speech serves as a justification of such propaganda. While it is the realization of the encouragement the fourth chorus made the audience expect, it cannot but make the audience feel the power of such a national myth in creating a sense of unity and brotherhood for those preparing for battle.

The episode with Gower and Fluellen is a perfect symbol for the redemption of rhetoric which occurs in the play-world of Shakespeare's heroic king. Gower, the namesake of the plain moralistic English poet, suggests that Fluellen's cudgels teach Pistol a fine English lesson. While Fluellen may not be able to "speak English in the native garb" (V.i.74-75), and although he was earlier deluded by Pistol's Tamburlainian bombast, his "correction" teaches Pistol "a good English condition" (V.i.77): to make his words match his deeds. Pistol's duplicitous misrepresentations of the hero are exposed in this play which resolves on the plain speech of its king in contrast to the bombast of the swaggerer, whether it be that of Pistol or that of the Dauphin. Indeed, the last act seems like Shakespeare's populist



response to the inflated idiom of Tamburlaine's Ovidian persuasions. It is as though Shakespeare is responding in kind to the challenge of Marlowe's "high astounding terms." Shakespeare makes his English king prefer the plain blunt idiom of the soldier for the "working day" (IV.iii.10). He makes him prefer the personal idiom of plain speech rather than the rhetorical ornament of Tamburlaine's dissimulating style. If Shakespeare tests Henry's word in the judgment scenes with Williams, his wooing scene seems like a concentration of Tamburlaine's rhetoric of romance in Henry's comic wooing of his captive Princess Katharine. The theme of the king's rhetoric is replayed in this comedy of manners orchestrated by a king who wants to put the best light that he can on the politics of a marriage of state. Interestingly, Henry's apologies, that as a soldier he cannot woo like the mincing courtier, are reminiscent of Agydas's arguments to Zenocrate about the impossibility of a lady of her breeding being charmed by the physical crudities of such a one as Tamburlaine. While Marlowe concludes *Part One* with Tamburlaine mythologizing his marriage to Zenocrate as a parallel to that of Jove and Juno, Henry represents himself as the Mars who has little idea of how to change his threatening idiom into the pleas of love.

In fact, Katharine's responses to the king discourage and deflate his effort to play the epic lover. Interpreting for Katharine, her lady-in-waiting Alice translates the Princess's reactions to Henry's initial attempts to woo her, saying that "de tongues of de mans is be full of deceits" (V.ii.119-20). Katharine's situation is similar to that of Zenocrate in *Tamburlaine*, for she is faced with the same paradox that Zenocrate faced: she loves the enemy of her country. While Zenocrate's lament for her country develops the paradox in terms of the sonnet lover, Katharine's question puts her paradoxical situation more directly, though it is rewritten in the broken strains of the Princess's "Franglais": "Is it possible dat I should love de *ennemi* of France?" (V.ii.170-71). Katharine, like Zenocrate, is the spoils of war, a fact that Henry does not try to hide, for he admits that "She is our capital demand, comprised / Within the fore-rank of our articles" (V.ii.96-97). Unlike Marlowe, who makes Tamburlaine's crowning of his Queen an ironic denunciation of Tamburlaine's politic rise to power, Shakespeare makes Henry's "honest" wooing of Katharine a commentary on the king's magnanimous handling of a public neces-

sity. In *Tamburlaine Part One*, the marriage is proof of Tamburlaine's shrewd policy, for he crowns Zenocrate with her own father's crown only at the end of the play when he has used Zenocrate's treasure and her good name to "persuade" an army of soldiers to his side. In *Henry V*, Henry admits the double perspective through which he sees his queen. As her father points out, Henry sees Katharine "perspectively, the cities turn'd into a maid; for they are all girdled with maiden walls that war hath never ent'red" (V.ii.320-22). The French King's words recall the earlier juxtaposition of Katharine and Henry in the third act. The warrior that Henry made the audience imagine in his bloody threatening speech to the Governor of Harfleur was paralleled with Katharine's precious language lesson. The audience were made to consider that Katharine learns English in anticipation that she will become the queen of a foreign court and that Henry is the conqueror who will "possess" her. In the resolution of the last act, Henry is uncompromising in his territorial demands, but his good-humored wooing of Katharine shows him, once more, attempting to make the best of a public necessity.

It is important that Henry, in establishing his person before Katharine, chooses the bluff good humor of his popular past; he adopts the humor of Hal to woo his wife. In contrast to Tamburlaine's Ovidian subterfuge, Henry's wooing resolves into the plain terms which he hopes will prove the worth of his oaths. While Tamburlaine uses the rhetoric of the "Passionate Shepherd to his Love," Henry chooses a plainer idiom. While Henry begins in flattery and with comparisons of Katharine to the angels, he quickly rejects the lovers' rhetoric and hopes to persuade Katharine by insisting on the stubbornness with which he will keep his oaths and vows. The deflation of his high sentiments of love secures a focus on his essential humanity; his rhetoric cannot win his love, but the tacit consent of the princess amused by his buffetings with words is a more intimate reaction of sympathy that does not make false and unrealistic promises before the union. The last words the king utters secure the impression that the foundation of his love for Katharine in marriage will be a bond as "well kept" as the oaths he makes to his soldiers. The king swears that on the day of his marriage he will ask the realm to serve as a witness and security to his oath: "My lord of Burgundy, we'll take your oath, / And all the peers', for surety of our

leagues. / Then shall I swear to Kate, and you to me, / And may our oaths well kept and prosp'rous be" (V.ii.369-72). Where Tamburlaine used Ovidian rhetoric to persuade Zenocrate and to vaunt his godlike power, Shakespeare makes Henry discover the value of plain speech and shun such an apotheosis in favor of the humility of a Christian king.

The multiple perspectives of Shakespeare's interpretation of his heroic king, then, work to create a feeling of infinite recursion; historical interpretation is set within its hermeneutical complexities and the Chorus's vision seems flattened like the ballad portraits which depict a monocular emblem of heroism. Such an invention makes the rhetorical structures of the play self-conscious; it makes the audience aware of the rhetorical manipulation of these "accounts." The Tamburlainian heroic idiom is brought forward; it is not allowed to develop the "admiration" or the "wonder" that is the central *raison d'être* of the style. Shakespeare's perspectival relief builds in reminders of Hal's former self even if he does not admit these elements into Henry's public decorum. The Chorus serves to foreground the selective and aristocratic picture of the chronicle Henry. The shifting focus of interpretations Shakespeare creates for his dramatic characterization of his "exemplary" king makes his audience reconsider the views of chroniclers' panegyric accounts like Halle's:

This kyng was a prince whom all men loued & of none disdained. This prince was a capitaine against whom fortune never frowned nor mischance once spurned. This capitaine was a shepherde whom his flocke loued and louyngly obeyed. This shepherd [sic] was such a iudiciary that no offe[n]ce was vnpunished nor friendship vnrewarded. This iusticiary was so feared, that all rebellion was banished and sedicion suppressed. . . .<sup>21</sup>

Shakespeare questions the chronicler's estimation of Henry as "humane" and "so severe a justicer that he left no offense unpunished" in his invention of the Eastcheap scenes. The king seems lacking in his humanity to his friends. As Nym points out, the only reward he offered Falstaff as a friend was that he left him with a heart "fracted and corroborate" (II.i.119). Similarly, his summary execution of

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<sup>21</sup> Edward Halle, *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York* (Menston: Scolar Press, 1970), 112.



Bardolph speaks to the severity of his justice. While his executions of the noble traitors seem justified and his command to kill the French prisoners is "retrospectively justified"<sup>22</sup> only after Fluellen has mistakenly applauded his decisiveness, the audience experiencing the play are allowed to feel the full weight of the king's responsibility.

The fifth chorus serves as an implicit criticism of the censored version of chronicle accounts that present England's heroic king as an exemplary monarch. The Chorus reminds the audience of the larger frame of reference outside the narration of events as they proceed in the chorus and in the dramatization of the events on the stage. He prompts them to reread the chronicles and to compare this dramatic treatment with the panegyrical accounts of the Tudor chronicles:

Vouchsafe to those that have not read the story  
That I may prompt them; and of such as have,  
I humbly pray them to admit th'excuse  
Of time, of numbers, and due course of things. . . .  
(V.pro.1-4)

The frame that Shakespeare creates to close this play refers his words to the "gentles" imagining the world of *Henry V* as a parallel to their own. As the Chorus personifies a kind of collective view of the culture's expectations of heroism, the chastened view in the fifth chorus represents the view of an audience who have reconsidered the demands of Tamburlainian heroism in a Christian context composed of all classes of men. The Chorus's view of the action has changed, and the fifth chorus praises Henry, not for his loud and noisy victory, but rather as a pious and humble victor:

Being free from vainness and self-glorious pride,  
[He gives] full trophy, signal, and ostent  
Quite from himself, to God. (V.pro.20-22)

That the triumphal return of Henry is down-played reflects the attitude Shakespeare would have his audience extend toward his heroic king. The humility of the Chorus's celebration serves as a criticism of the Tamburlainian triumph they had formerly applauded. The fifth chorus acts to make the audience reconsider their

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<sup>22</sup> Taylor, 32-34.



enthusiasm for Henry as the exemplary model for conquering heroes of the present. Having just envisaged the king forbidding a Roman triumph, the Chorus alludes to the reception expected for the audience's "conquering Caesar":

Were now the General of our gracious Empress,  
As in good time he may, from Ireland coming,  
Bringing rebellion broached on his sword,  
How many would the peaceful city quit  
To welcome him! (V.pro.30-34)

The coordination of Henry's unostentatious and humble return to England, and the anticipation of the "triumph" the Londoners expect for Essex, cannot but implicate the audience in their enthusiasm to see contemporary conquerors as parallels to the ancients.<sup>23</sup>

It is particularly appropriate that Shakespeare calls attention to his art by composing the Epilogue in the form of a sonnet and that the *peripeteia* of the sonnet comes, in the Petrarchan manner, after the eighth line with a shift from the glorious father to the inglorious son. Even faced with the imminence of his death, Tamburlaine continued to boast that he held Fortune in his command. Shakespeare's ending of *Henry V*, in contrast, places an ironic perspective on the Tamburlainian *trionfi*. His Epilogue sums up the end of the hero; the fall of the legacy of this English hero is a parallel to Tamburlaine's directions to his son Amyras to continue his conquests of Fortune. However, Tamburlaine's attempt to achieve a victory even over death is reversed in Shakespeare's play. The choric epilogue which ends Shakespeare's play reminds the audience that "Fortune made [Henry's] sword," (V.epi.6) but frames the utterance as an ironic narrative which chronicles the fall of the hero's control of Fortune. In the end, his legacy was lost through ill management and civil war.

That the Epilogue is a sonnet calls attention to its art. However, unlike Tamburlaine's sonnet on beauty which deflected attention

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<sup>23</sup> For a good discussion of the relationship between contemporary "heroes" and literary models, see Ray Heffner, "Essex the Ideal Courtier," *English Literary History* 1 (1934): 7-36, and Anthony Esler, *The Aspiring Mind of the Elizabethan Younger Generation* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1966).

from the brutal slaughter of the virgins, Shakespeare's artful contrivance calls attention to the art of historiography as it was practiced by a world eager for the heroic portraits of worthies adopting the classical models.<sup>24</sup> The Chorus calls attention to the art of history which fashions its portraits of kings into a "form" or order. It is to the conception of the "dramatic" shifts of successive "tragic," "victorious," and "unquiet" lives in Halle that Shakespeare gets his notion of the phases of history in outline. The contrivances of Henry's "working words" could control the generic determination of this phase of history; however, with the turn of the sonnet we are embroiled in the history of a weak king. We feel the mutability of glory in the demise of the famous father and his replacement by an ineffective son who led England to the civil broils of the Wars of the Roses, which Shakespeare reminds us "oft [his] stage hath shown" (V.epi.13).

The Chorus suggests that fortune made Henry's sword but that his brief and glorious reign was an interruption of a pattern of retribution which must run its course in the reign of Henry VI. The Chorus takes the orthodox view of the Tudor myth and explains Henry's reign in terms of it. It is in order to praise Henry that the Chorus alludes to the interpretation, for only such an important figure could have stayed the will of Divine Providence and postponed the vengeance supposed to run its course. The Chorus emphasizes the element of cosmic destiny and not the "prevention" of characters shrewdly orchestrating events of history to their own designs. Shakespeare's "bending author" (V.epi.2), however, has found a way to "prevent" the censor who would contest a view which did not include the official Tudor myth; the structural parallels the audience re-create as the play proceeds create a historical record of a shrewd king who manipulates the accounts of his own history. In addition, they allow for a more personal view of the king than a selective view of panegyric chroniclers writing Tudor propaganda. Shakespeare makes his audience imagine the backstage of his hero's mind.

If his audience, habituated to twelve years of heroic plays, ex-

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<sup>24</sup> David Quint, "Alexander the Pig: Shakespeare on Poetry and History," *Boundary II* 10, no. 3 (1982): 49-67.

pected to see Shakespeare's *Henry V* as an exemplary fiction, Shakespeare's play does everything in its power to deny them this satisfaction. While *Henry V* begins by making the audience expect an "epic" characterization of Henry V, it becomes a kind of anti-epic play which warns them against using the imperialism of Henry V in France as an exemplary model for their conquest in Ireland.<sup>25</sup> The opening chorus uses the imagery of the *Mirror for Magistrates* in its invocation of the muse of fire, but ironically, that imagery turns out to be that of the muse of War. Shakespeare implicates his audience in their enthusiasm for the epic which aspires to the literature of classical disputes amongst pagan gods of war rather than fashion a literature around a Christian concern for peace. When the French king gives Katharine to Henry, his imagery reminds the audience of the opening figures of war. He merges it with a chivalric threatening idiom, but then resolves it with the georgic resolution of a Christian prayer:

Take her, fair son, and from her blood raise up  
 Issue to me, that the contending kingdoms  
 Of France and England, whose very shores look pale  
 With envy of each other's happiness,  
 May cease their hatred, and this clear conjunction  
 Plant neighbourhood and Christian-like accord.

(V.ii.345-51)

The French king's hope for a Christian concord is the keynote of Shakespeare's peaceful recontextualization of the theme of future generations which, in *Tamburlaine*, is the fulfillment of the legacy of the heroic conqueror-tyrant. The last scene summarizes the brutalizing effects of war in Burgundy's description of its ravages. In this lengthy elaboration of the spoil and desolation wrought on France, Burgundy comments not only on the effects to the land, but also on the character of the people, for he says that people "grow like savages—as soldiers will / That nothing do but meditate on blood"

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<sup>25</sup> As David Quint points out, Fluellen's parallel of Henry and Alexander is an implicit criticism of the cultural appropriation of classical exemplars as models for the present (49-67).



(V.ii.59–60).<sup>26</sup> His figurative explanations of the necessary brutality of war bring under scrutiny the imperialism of Henry's war and, indirectly, Tamburlaine's concept of aspiration and heroic apotheosis. His set speech is modeled on the pastoral, but it is the pastoral world that is destroyed by the ravages of war that he describes. Chronicling the waste, rape, and desolation of the "world's best garden" which Henry has achieved, sounds like a second Fall—for France. The implication is that a second ransom will be necessary to redeem such a world.

Burgundy's georgic description makes the audience think of Virgil, but his speech is a reversal of the Virgilian apotheosis and its conception of a pastoral golden world. Just as Shakespeare showed the fancifulness of the Archbishop's conception of government as a bee commonwealth,<sup>27</sup> so he also shows the inadequacy of Virgil's justification of imperialism. Burgundy's passage is a kind of anti-georgic speech which reverses the normal expectations of the pastoral in relation to the heroic. Whereas in Virgil the heroic conquest of territory is the preparation for the foundation of a nation in peace and harmony under cultivation by man's arts, Burgundy's speech makes the audience consider the futility and waste of war and makes such an apotheosis as Virgil envisages seem fanciful. Burgundy's speech focuses the audience on the futility and desolation of war.

Shakespeare's *Henry V*, then, questions the prestige of the epic and the heroic in Elizabethan culture. Instead of making his play answer the Elizabethan taste for "new immortal Iliads,"<sup>28</sup> it makes the audience question their aspirations to create such a literature. As *Tamburlaine* was written to make its audience question using Scythian conquerors as models of exemplification for a Christian community at a time when England was looking for exemplary models of inspiration for the Netherlands, so *Henry V* questions using Henry V as an exemplary model for the present.<sup>29</sup> Both *Tamburlaine* and

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<sup>26</sup> See James Bulman, "Shakespeare's Georgic Histories," *Shakespeare Survey* 38 (1985): 37–48.

<sup>27</sup> See Andrew Gurr, "Henry V and the Bees Commonwealth," *Shakespeare Survey* 30 (1977): 61–72.

<sup>28</sup> Samuel Daniel, *The Civil Wars*, ed. Lawrence Michel (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1958), 179.

<sup>29</sup> See above n. 18.



*Henry V* are written to implicate their audiences in their enthusiasm for heroical fictions and ultimately to expose them as cultural propaganda. Marlowe's plays (especially *Tamburlaine Part One*) expose the literary fictions deployed by parvenus like Leicester, who used classical exemplary fictions to legitimize his aspirations and to promote the wars in the Netherlands.<sup>30</sup> Shakespeare's *Henry V* exposes the aspirations of Elizabethan would-be conquerors like Essex.<sup>31</sup> By drawing typological parallels between recent and past English history, Shakespeare makes his audience reconsider their enthusiasm for its own "figures play[ing] the Tamburlaine"<sup>32</sup> in real life: literary revision becomes cultural revision.

*Henry V* is testament to the fact that in 1599 Shakespeare understood Marlowe's ironic intentions in *Tamburlaine Parts One and Two*. In *Henry V* Shakespeare works in the spirit of Marlowe's irony. He models his play on Marlowe's cynical analysis of heroic fictions and his ambiguous characterization of the hero-tyrant. He adopts Marlowe's ironic model of the hero-tyrant to portray the king whose heroism he could not openly question. In an England where Henry V was the exemplary model *par excellence*, Shakespeare could not have written a critical account. While he goes further than Marlowe in creating a greater number of perspective frames and voices interpreting his king, his invention is essentially based on Marlowe's analysis of how literary fictions are used for cultural propaganda. Shakespeare's vision of rhetoric, however, is more complex than Marlowe's: he makes his audience consider rhetoric a necessary tool of persuasion in the commonwealth as well as an instrument of propaganda. His play is dramaturgically sophisticated in its manipulation of its audience. The parallel structure works subliminally as well as explicitly; the play is both expressionistic and analytic. The audience are given an account of Henry V which makes them see him from the inside out; they create their own "parallel Lives" in

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<sup>30</sup> I argue this point more fully in my dissertation: Anne Elizabeth Ross, "Hand-Me-Down-Heroics: A Practical Poetics of the Heroical Kind" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Toronto, 1993), 68–133. For a good discussion of exemplary fictions in the Renaissance, see Timothy Hampton, *Writing from History: The Rhetoric of Exemplarity in Renaissance Literature*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1990).

<sup>31</sup> See Shapiro (cited in n. 3), 351–66.

<sup>32</sup> Altman, 15.

the contrasts and comparisons they make between dramatic and historical heroes and contemporaries emulating such "worthies."

Written at least twelve years after Marlowe's *Tamburlaine Part One* was first produced, Shakespeare's *Henry V*, then, serves as a retrospective of the Tamburlainian tradition as it had been adopted as a literary and cultural model. Shakespeare's play looks back through the generic tradition founded on Marlowe's innovation. It may be that it serves to realign a tradition which had departed from the intention of the original. While the various Tamburlainian "progeny" imitated Marlovian rhetorical conventions and spectacles, they either simplified, misunderstood, or pandered to their audience's taste for uncomplicated portraits of heroism or tyranny. Shakespeare builds Marlowe's ambivalence toward his hero and his sophisticated irony back into his "revision." His *Henry V* does for the 1590s what Marlowe's play had done for the 1580s: it deconstructs the heroic fictions which inspired his audience. Just as Marlowe's plays make his audience revise their enthusiasm for humanist exemplary fictions based on classical and especially Herculean models, so Shakespeare makes his audience revise their enthusiasm for Tamburlainian models of heroic emulation.



Hugh M. Richmond

## The Resurrection of an Expired Form: *Henry VIII* as Sequel to *Richard III*

Negative critical comment on what is now often considered to be Shakespeare's last complete play<sup>1</sup> usually argues that it relapses rather clumsily into what seems an archaic form: the chronicle or history play with which he began his career in *Henry VI*. The almost medieval complexity of this typically Tudor form draws

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<sup>1</sup> For a representative survey of recent scholarly opinion on the authorship question, see John Margeson's introduction to his edition of William Shakespeare, *King Henry VIII* (New Cambridge Shakespeare Series [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990], 4-14). There is an unmistakable tendency for supporters of divided authorship to take a negative view of the script's value, so that the marked increase recently in positive criticism of the play favors either full Shakespearean authorship, or at least treatment of the text as a wholly integrated artifact. See also Stanley Wells, ed., *Shakespeare: A Bibliographical Guide*, new edition, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 381-87. Wells' personal preference for divided authorship now seems distinctly old-fashioned, despite the last effort to validate Victorian disintegrationist speculation by Cyrus Hoy, "The Shares of Fletcher and his Collaborators in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon (VII)." *Studies in Bibliography*, 15 (1962): 71-90. The argument seemingly no longer greatly interests most of the play's expositors. Like other admirers of it, I accept the argument for unity well stated in the introduction to R. A. Foakes's edition of *Henry VIII* (New Arden Series [London: Methuen, 1964], xv-lxvii). See the fuller review of these issues through survey of the script's stage history in Hugh M. Richmond, *Shakespeare in Performance: King Henry VIII* (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester Univ. Press, 1994).



heavily on diverse historical narratives to the point of risking the sacrifice of elegance in both style and structure to the exigencies of representing a plausible stage facsimile of the historians' consensus (or lack of it) about past events and personalities. After *Richard III* Shakespeare seems to move steadily away from the genre's characteristically discontinuous structure, which confounds Sir Philip Sidney's Aristotelian approach to the medieval tapestry of plots interwoven throughout such scripts as *Henry VI*. However, Shakespeare never wholly abandoned the multifaceted chronicle genre, though he strayed away from English history under the influence of Plutarch, in his Roman plays. Moreover, though the other major tragedies show far less sustained concern to re-enact recorded history than the English history plays and the Roman ones, the tragedies are not wholly without historical allusions. *King Lear* and *Macbeth* are both diversified by much local detail from contemporary Elizabethan sources for what then passed as British history, such as the references to Edward the Confessor in *Macbeth*, or the anachronistic constellation of Saxon names in *Lear* derived from the prominent reign of King Edgar (Oswald, Edmund). And even later, the more historical elements of *Cymbeline* explicitly bridge the cultural gap between the Rome of Octavius Caesar and the native British tradition, despite the play's numerous anachronisms and fanciful elements. There is therefore a detectable continuity in Shakespeare's use of formal historical references throughout his career.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, after the largely fanciful modes of *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*, the abrupt return to a primarily political chronicle play in *Henry VIII* comes as a shock to many sophisticated critics. The unexpected documentary quality of this careful recension of Holinshed may partly explain the play's unfashionableness and even the modern attempt to repudiate it as not entirely Shakespeare's work, so that any supposed unworthiness or eccentricity can be blamed on Fletcher's divergence from the master. As Reginald Foakes notes: "It is significant that support for Fletcher

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<sup>2</sup> The Middle Comedies may seem the least likely place to find any historical motifs, but see Leslie Hotson, *The First Night of "Twelfth Night,"* (New York: Macmillan, 1954), and Hugh M. Richmond "Much Ado About Notables," *Shakespeare Studies* 12 (1979): 49-63, as well as Footnotes 22 and 23 below.

has always been associated with condemnation of *Henry VIII* as bad, or lacking in unity.”<sup>3</sup> However, the text may perhaps be made even less liable to censure through the discrediting of the charge of joint authorship if it displays a detailed, sustained, and conscious continuity of form, content and style with Shakespeare’s earlier works, rather than deviation and decline from them. For *Henry VIII* illustrates in remarkable detail a conscious and overtly asserted reversion to the form of history play associated with Shakespeare’s youth, specifically to the episodic structure, massing of documentary data, ambivalent characterization, religious themes, and ritual style of *Richard III*. However, it is my contention here that each reuse of historical material from the chronicles by Shakespeare involves a fresh aesthetic permutation of effects from earlier models to provide a unique fusion. This synthesis can be made precisely evident only by juxtaposition with its closest earlier analogues in Shakespeare’s *oeuvre*. The conclusions drawn from use of the comparative techniques of such a “syncretic” criticism<sup>4</sup> will demonstrate exactly by what means the tone of the last play associates the more gracious mood of the romances with the harsh facts of English political history which *Richard III* had presented so brutally. The uniqueness of Shakespeare’s last play will thus paradoxically appear precisely at its point of maximum resemblance to his earlier work.

It is nevertheless clear that in several ways *Henry VIII* remains a nostalgic exercise in generic revisionism of a kind which many critics have seen to be highly characteristic of the aging Shakespeare. For

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<sup>3</sup> Foakes, xxii.

<sup>4</sup> The exact procedures and validation for this method, under the title of “Syncretic Criticism,” are described in Hugh M. Richmond, “The Evolution of Sensibility,” Chapter 1 in *The School of Love: The Evolution of the Stuart Love Lyric* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1964), 3–23. In chronicle plays generally, as with *Henry VIII*, any fresh synthesis usually involves a blending of historical data with existing literary motifs. See, for example, the history-play genre’s assimilation of the rhetorical formula of the death lament as traced in Velma Bourgeois Richmond, “Dramatic Elements in Laments for the Dead,” in the fifth chapter of *Laments for the Dead in Medieval Literature* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne Univ. Press, 1966), 127ff., a study which provides a precedent for my method here not only by its demonstration of the relevance of the genre of “romance” to the great lament for Henry V which begins *Henry VI* but also to those numerous laments with which *Richard III* and *Henry VIII* are almost equally bedecked, though expressing such contrasting moods.

there has been a strong tendency recently to perceive that even the most marginal of Shakespeare's last plays are not as different generically from the earlier ones as was suggested by the modern scholarly commitment to a distinct category for what recent editions regularly identify as "romances."<sup>5</sup> In terms of the English histories, John Velz has already seen parallels between *Richard III* and *Sir Thomas More*, which are roughly contemporary, and he points out the necessary resemblances between the historical subject of the latter play and *Henry VIII*, in which Sir Thomas More reappears.<sup>6</sup> The Levantine vagaries of *Pericles* are prefigured in *The Comedy of Errors*, and they have been perceived to be no less consistently Shakespearean by modern scholars as different as G. Wilson Knight, Philip Edwards, and, most recently, Karen Csengeri.<sup>7</sup> Glynne Wickham recently observed that *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is in many ways a continuation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.<sup>8</sup> In a relevant essay about "The Integrity of Shakespeare" J. M. Nosworthy has asserted that "the glorious conglomeration of styles" in *Cymbeline* is not derived from participation by another inferior talent or even based on Shakespeare's own deft imitation of lately fashionable contemporaries, but is a synthesis of detailed effects characteristic of earlier plays of his own.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, in terms of that play's content, I have myself dem-

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<sup>5</sup> See Alfred Harbage, ed., *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1969), 1256; G. Blakemore Evans, ed., *Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 976; David Bevington, ed., *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, Third Edition, (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman, 1980), 1379. All subsequent Shakespeare citations are from this last edition.

<sup>6</sup> John Velz, "Sir Thomas More and the Shakespeare canon: two approaches," in *Shakespeare and Sir Thomas More*, T. H. Howard-Hill, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 182-90. Velz also notes such parallels between *Richard III* and *Henry VIII* as the scenes in both plays covering the execution of the two Dukes of Buckingham, father and son. Velz (184) considers *Henry VIII*, II.i. "simply a revision" of *Richard III*, V.i.

<sup>7</sup> G. Wilson Knight, "The Writing of *Pericles*," in *The Crown of Life*, (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1947), 32-75; Philip Edwards, "An Approach to the Problem of *Pericles*," *Shakespeare Survey* 5 (1952): 25-49; Karen Csengeri, "William Shakespeare, Sole Author of *Pericles*," *English Studies* 71 (June, 1990): 230-43.

<sup>8</sup> Glynne Wickham, "The Two Noble Kinsmen or *A Midsummer Night's Dream Part II*?" in G. R. Hibbard, ed. *The Elizabethan Theatre VIII* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1980).

<sup>9</sup> J. M. Nosworthy, "The Integrity of Shakespeare: Illustrated from *Cymbeline*," *Shakespeare Survey* 8 (1955): 55.



onstrated that in a strictly chronological sense *Cymbeline* proves to be the unexpected climax of a historical Roman trilogy, covering the rise and decline of Octavius Caesar, which includes *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*.<sup>10</sup>

With a range of accepted continuities between most of Shakespeare's last plays and their antecedents in his works, it seems plausible to develop further one of these two precedents for what many scholars now consider to be Shakespeare's last play, not least because the text of *Henry VIII* consciously invites recall of both historical material and a generic formula developed by that predecessor. I hope to confirm the plausibility of J. M. Nosworthy's assertion that to understand Shakespeare's late plays we do not need to find new genres or sources but to perceive that "simply he returned to his own earlier practices."<sup>11</sup> Far from failing to achieve his goals in *Henry VIII*, that play confirms Nosworthy's assertion that such questionable Shakespearean plays prove that "when he is least himself, or at least what we might expect him to be, he is most himself."<sup>12</sup> In these terms, the alternative title of *Henry VIII*, which Wotton and Bluett first identified as *All Is True*,<sup>13</sup> suggests that by reverting to the form of the chronicle play Shakespeare was self-consciously vindicating the plausibility of such an earlier romance as *The Winter's Tale* by showing that the story line of the unfairly repudiated wife and the providential arrival of a daughter could be matched by Tudor history. Certainly *Henry VIII* is a case where "there may be more profit in seeking for Shakespeare in what purports to be his."<sup>14</sup> In relating *Henry VI* and *Richard III* to *Henry VIII* I may even come close to outbidding Nosworthy's claim (with the antecedents to *Cymbeline* which he finds in *Titus Andronicus*) of "illustrating Shakespearean continuity over what is practically the longest possible period."<sup>15</sup> The dramatic formula with which Shake-

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<sup>10</sup> Hugh M. Richmond, "Shakespeare's Roman Trilogy: the Climax in *Cymbeline*," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 5 (April 1972): 129-39.

<sup>11</sup> Nosworthy, 56.

<sup>12</sup> Nosworthy, 56.

<sup>13</sup> Margeson, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Nosworthy, 56.

<sup>15</sup> Nosworthy, 56.



spere closes his career seems likely to be the one which he had evolved in creating his first English tetralogy.

The sense of political continuity is an essential element in the character of most of Shakespeare's history plays, not least in *Richard III*. This sustained allusion to context is no less marked in *Henry VIII* when Shakespeare recalls the reign of Richard III as deliberately as he had done the reign of Henry VI in the ominous Epilogue to *Henry V*. One may not want to make too much of the mere recurrence of the historical names of Norfolk, Surrey, and Lovell in the latest history play. However, structurally both plays surround the monarch with minor cycles illustrating the vicissitudes of lesser lives. Thus the fall of the Duke of Buckingham in *Henry VIII* is systematically matched with that of his father in *Richard III* when the son recalls ruefully, on his way to execution, how:

My noble father, Henry of Buckingham,  
 Who first rais'd head against usurping Richard,  
 Flying for succor to his servant Banister,  
 Being distress'd, was by that wretch betray'd,  
 And without trial fell; God's peace be with him!  
 Henry the Seventh succeeding, truly pitying  
 My father's loss, like a most royal prince  
 Restor'd me to my honors, and, out of ruins,  
 Made my name once more noble. Now his son,  
 Henry the Eighth, life, honor, name, and all  
 That made me happy, at one stroke has taken  
 For ever from the world. I had my trial,  
 And needs must say, a noble one; which makes me  
 A little happier than my wretched father.  
 Yet thus far are we one in fortunes: both  
 Fell by our servants, by those men we lov'd most—  
 A most unnatural and faithless service!  
 Heaven has an end in all. (II.i.107-24)

Curiously enough, this scene with its many elaborate and conscious references to events in the last two acts of *Richard III* is sometimes assigned to Fletcher, but Shakespeare obviously intends us to create the characteristic perspective of receding parallels with which all his history plays are filled. He makes a close correlation

between the three kings' behavior, in which Henry VIII is not paralleled with his benevolent father, Henry VII, but with the sinister Richard III, because of Henry VIII's ruthless execution of a duke for challenging the state's established authority. Indeed, the similar ground for the execution of the two dukes encourages us to note the tyrannical nature of these rulers, whom both dukes seemingly seek to assassinate according to the testimony of the Surveyor. He reports that, after Buckingham received a royal reproof:

"If," quoth he, "I for this had been committed,  
As, to the Tower, I thought, I would have played  
The part my father meant to act upon  
Th'usurper Richard, who, being at Salisbury,  
Made suit to come in's presence, which, if granted,  
As he made semblance of his duty, would  
Have put his knife into him." . . .  
After "the duke his father," with the "knife," . . .  
He did discharge a horrible oath, whose tenor  
Was, were he as evil us'd, he would outgo  
His father by as much as a performance  
Does an irresolute purpose. (I.ii.193-99, 203, 206-9)

This situation reconvenes the homicidal society of *Richard III* with its bizarre and fatal relationships which often provoke hasty furies and ruthless executions. By hindsight we know that the Tudor dynasty will survive Henry VIII's vicissitudes, but the situation in the first act of the play is as fraught with political uncertainty as the opening of *Henry VI* or *Richard II*. Typically, Shakespeare's version of the history play is not a simply affirmative one, particularly in the opening scenes. In *Henry VIII* we have an initial movement precipitated by an erratic, inexperienced ruler, influenced by self-serving advisors, and threatened by instability abroad in Europe as well as subversion at home in England. The play reveals potentialities for diplomatic and political collapse from which the Tudors had already rescued England once under the guidance of Henry VII, as anticipated at the end of *Richard III*. But this classic opening for a chronicle play shows us a political state under serious threat of destabilization, whether we talk of *Henry VI*, *Henry IV*, or even *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus*.

Nor are domestic relations between the sexes exempt from

equally sinister overtones in either play, or in the genre as a whole, in which women tend to play only ominous, frustrated, or miserable roles. For we can hardly avoid noting that there are many other sinister resemblances between the eponymous kings than the political ones: not least that each most inappropriately courts and marries a Lady Anne for whose death (indeed, murder) he is personally responsible—historically in Henry VIII's case, though this is not shown, while in Richard's it is merely implied (without historical validity) by Shakespeare through Richard's orders:

Come hither, Catesby. Rumor it abroad  
That Anne, my wife, is very grievous sick;  
I will take order for her keeping close. (IV.ii.50–52)

Anne has already clearly detected that Richard "will, no doubt, shortly be rid of me" (IV.i.86) as Richard soon casually confirms: "Anne my wife hath bid this world good night." (IV.iii.39) If the later play avoids recognition of the execution of Henry's Anne by its breaking-off point, still no audience of Shakespeare's time (nor surely of our own) can ignore the fatal aura surrounding his Anne Bullen even before that conclusion. I have seen modern audiences shiver at the dramatic irony of Anne's unwitting anticipation of her own execution, when she is made to exclaim over Henry's ominous attentions:

Would I had no being  
If this salute my blood a jot! It faints me  
To think what follows. (II.iii.102–4)

The imagery of "no being," "blood," and being "faint" from fear, anticipates her doom, even if all she can consciously predict is adultery with Henry. At the end of the play, the absence of Anne from the christening does little to exorcise this awareness of her impending fate. Obviously, it is hard for us to accept Henry's final, seemingly confident standing in the script without serious reservations,<sup>16</sup> even if they are powerfully offset by our sense that they will be transcended in the reign of his new daughter.

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<sup>16</sup> For example, modern directors find it hard to resist an unscripted allusion to the ominous future, as in Trevor Nunn's production at the RSC in 1969, which ended with a grim Henry alone on stage, anticipating his later troubles.

Moreover, sexuality in Shakespearean history plays usually reflects a perverse desire in male leaders to violate political decorum by inappropriate or inept sexual alliances.<sup>17</sup> In *Richard III* this ineptitude appears in Richard's courtship of the dowager Queen Elizabeth to further his incestuous marriage to his niece, Princess Elizabeth. This issue may remind us that, in the Blackfriars divorce proceedings, Henry VIII also appears guilty of an incestuous first marriage to his brother's bride.<sup>18</sup> The political consequences of these genealogical complications match the issues of succession raised in *Richard III* by its stress on the sexual vagaries of Edward IV, which led to his supposedly bigamous marriage to Elizabeth Woodville. Richard of Gloucester exploits these aberrations to advance his claims to the succession by inferring "the bastardy of Edward's children" via Buckingham's advocacy:

You say that Edward is your brother's son.  
 So say we too, but not by Edward's wife;  
 For first he was contract to Lady Lucy—  
 Your mother lives a witness to his vow—  
 And afterward by substitute betroth'd  
 To Bona, sister to the King of France.  
 These both put off, a poor petitioner,  
 A care-craz'd mother to a many sons  
 A beauty-waning and distressed widow,  
 Even in the afternoon of her best days,  
 Made prize and purchase of his wanton eye,  
 Seduc'd the pitch and height of his degree  
 To base declension and loath'd bigamy.  
 By her, in his unlawful bed, he got  
 This Edward, whom our manners call the Prince.  
 (III.vii.177-91)

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<sup>17</sup> One recalls Antony's renewed adultery after his unwise marriage to Octavia, which is a factor in his ruin in *Antony and Cleopatra*. How deep an issue Shakespeare finds the specific question of incest in marriage with a deceased brother's wife had already appeared in his use of it as a central issue in Hamlet's charges against Claudius.

<sup>18</sup> One may also note Henry's later violation of canon law in marrying Anne Boleyn after debauching her sister Mary, for which he had to secure a further dispensation from Cranmer in addition to the annulment of his first marriage.



Henry VI's marriage to Margaret of Anjou may not violate sexual taboos so grossly, but marriage to an enemy alien hardly suggests sexual decorum either. Predictably, in view of the adulterous purpose of Suffolk's manipulations of the partners in this marriage, the outcomes are disastrous. A classic interest in Shakespeare's history plays derives from such tensions between private sexual drives and public policy.

Such questionable male marital choices also underlie many of the more public political and diplomatic issues and events in *Henry VIII*, for Henry VIII specifically identifies the issue of the legitimacy of his children as the origin of his own anxieties about his marriage:

My conscience first receiv'd a tenderness,  
 Scruple, and prick, on certain speeches utter'd  
 By th' Bishop of Bayonne, then French ambassador,  
 Who had been hither sent on the debating  
 A marriage 'twixt the Duke of Orleans and  
 Our daughter Mary. I'th' progress of this business,  
 Ere a determinate resolution, he,  
 I mean the Bishop, did require a respite,  
 Wherein he might the King his lord advertise  
 Whether our daughter were legitimate,  
 Respecting this our marriage with the dowager,  
 Sometime our brother's wife. This respite  
 Shook the bosom of my conscience. (II.iv.168-80)

Male sexual vagaries lie at the heart of societal and even political tensions in many of Shakespeare's major plays. Moreover, not only does this issue touch directly on the status of Princess Mary, it remains a concern for the Princess Elizabeth whose birth is celebrated at the end of the play. Anne Boleyn was herself plagued by innumerable charges of sexual misconduct: of adultery with Sir Thomas Wyatt, of incestuously succeeding her sister Mary in the affections of Henry, of a bigamous marriage while Katharine was still alive, and by the final, fatal one of incest with her brother for which she was executed. As a result, a charge of illegitimacy similar to those made against Edward V and Mary Tudor also bedevilled the succession of Queen Elizabeth I. This gave credence and motive to the counterclaim to the English throne of Mary, Queen of Scots, which

led to her execution while a prisoner of her rival, like that of the young Edward V in *Richard III*. Dynastic genealogy and family continuity are intrinsic issues in all of Shakespeare's histories.

Thus the royal name of Elizabeth rings through both plays. The precedent for later Tudor use of the name is found in the dowager Queen Elizabeth of *Richard III*, who is bereft of her two young Princes in the Tower, but whose surviving daughter, Princess Elizabeth of York, ultimately marries Henry VII, not Richard, and proves to be the grandmother of Queen Elizabeth I. Plans for the marriage of the earlier Princess Elizabeth end *Richard III* with the same expectation of a humane and fertile peace as that which ends *Henry VIII* in Cranmer's pacific prophecy at the christening of the later Princess Elizabeth. This matrilineal sequence provides another important thematic link between the two plays, for both lay great stress on maternal relationships. In this emphasis they are characteristic of the genre developed by the four plays of the first tetralogy, as sustained in both *King John* (with the omnipresent Constance) and *Richard II* (with the compulsive Duchess of York). The massed mothers of *Richard III* do much to neutralize and subdue Richard's virtuosity in the later parts of the play. For example, we must consider the formative effect of his own mother's progressive alienation, culminating in her curse of him, but marked by hostility from his birth:

Thou cam'st to earth to make the earth my hell.  
A grievous burthen was thy birth to me,  
Tetchy and wayward was thy infancy;  
Thy school-days frightful, desp'rate, wild, and furious,  
Thy prime of manhood daring, bold, and venturous;  
Thy age confirm'd, proud, subtle, sly, and bloody,  
More mild, but yet more harmful, kind in hatred.  
(IV.iv.167-73)

Such a mother may be said to warp her child before she damns it. In his celebrated performance in *Richard III* at the RSC in 1984, Antony Sher detected the key to his whole temperament in this one of all Richard's relationships.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Antony Sher, *The Year of the King: an Actor's Diary and Sketchbook*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1985), 129.

Nor does the erratic hostility of the dowager Queen Elizabeth prove quite as harmless as Richard believes at her departing assent to his request for her daughter's hand: "Relenting fool, and shallow, changing woman!" (IV.iv.431) For most members of Shakespeare's audience would remember throughout this scene that, whatever she may say and despite her final seeming submission, Queen Elizabeth ultimately reneged on her consent, and gave her daughter to Henry Tudor in ratification of his succession as Henry VII, which is noted at the end of the play. Equally definitive of the play's outcome is the relentless and supernatural malevolence of Queen Margaret, which brings a metaphysical authority to the fate of Richard through her effective curses and convincing prophecies, validated by our hindsight of their fulfillment. Less obvious but by no means less significant is the climactic maternal triumph of the Countess of Derby, "who prays continually for Richmond's good" (V.iii.84), as well she might, for historically it was her influence which lay behind the successful challenge to Richard mounted by her son, Henry Tudor, the Earl of Richmond, as Richard himself perceives in the play: "Stanley, look to your wife. If she convey / Letters to Richmond, you shall answer it." (IV.ii.92-93)

These impressive maternal figures provide early precedents for the role of Queen Katharine of Aragon, whose fight to preserve her own rights against the manipulations of Wolsey also, of course, involves those of her daughter, the Princess Mary, as she reminds us in seeking Henry's benevolence:

I have commended to his goodness  
The model of our chaste loves, his young daughter—  
The dews of heaven fall thick in blessings on her!—  
Beseeching him to give her virtuous breeding—  
She is young, and of a noble modest nature,  
I hope she will deserve well. (IV.ii.131-36).

Even Anne Bullen's tacitly maternal role in the play may be somewhat purged of impropriety by our awareness of the vicarious validation it receives from the magnificent career of her daughter, whose anticipation provides the play's coda. One of the most powerful dramatic ironies of this conclusion is that most audiences know the unsatisfactory final outcome of Henry's compulsive pursuit of a male heir, and



that the two princesses whose existence frustrates it during the course of this play will be far more significant than his son Edward VI ever proved. Once again the authority of the female line ultimately outweighs that of the male choices, just as at the end of *The Winter's Tale*. While this issue is very prominent in the earliest chronicle plays about Henry VI, it is one of the concerns of such plays concealed by the less obvious female presence in *Henry IV, Part 1*, which makes that successful play less generically normative than the others.

Thus positive feminine influences are significant in both *Richard III* and *Henry VIII*, despite the perverse marriages which drive their plots and provide much of their sinister fascination. And it is primarily the volatility of male sexuality which precipitates these anomalies, for the male lovers' behavior is presented in a much more negative light than that of the women they love. The courtships that precede the marriages share a grotesque irony. We see monstrous parodies of Romeo's sentimentalities to Juliet in each play, with the cynical extravagance of Richard's seductions of Anne and Elizabeth, and with Henry's courtly flattery of Anne which scarcely masks his incipient adultery at Wolsey's ball. The latter closely matches Romeo's fickleness to Rosaline at the Capulets' analogous ball, but carries it to a more ominous level of willfulness than the mere challenging of a feud's loyalties, for Rosaline has no claims on her facile lover comparable to those of Queen Katharine on her husband of many years, and the alienation of Spain resulting from her divorce dominates English history for the rest of the century. In perversely courting his Lancastrian enemy, widow of the murdered Prince of Wales, the Yorkist Richard of Gloucester also systematically and cynically exploits most of the sentimental extravagances of a Romeo (both, for example, affect to welcome death if their beloveds should wish it). Similarly absolute, on first meeting his Anne, Henry says: "The fairest hand I ever touch'd! O beauty, / Till now I never knew thee!" (I.iv.75-76) Here he echoes Romeo's first reaction to Juliet: "I ne'er saw true beauty till this night." (I.v.54) And if Juliet censures Romeo because "You kiss by th' book." (I.v.111), Henry is equally artful in his osculations: "Sweet-heart, / I were unmannerly, to take you out / And not to kiss you." (I.iv.95-97) But what appears naive innocence in Romeo appears here as culpable dishonor, particularly for a king who has just censured the Frenchified fashions and sexual



decadence in his own court (I.ii.18-41), merely for following his own precedent at the Field of the Cloth of Gold (with accounts of which the play opened)—and who soon proceeds to censure Wolsey for his ostentation and frivolity (I.iv.87-89). Anticipating this affected puritanism in his opening soliloquy, Richard of Gloucester begins his ominous career in *Richard III* with the same hostility to courtly self-indulgence, only to outdo his brother Edward's virtuosity in courtship no less abruptly than does Henry VIII.

These formulaic resemblances in content and style between the early history plays and the latest history are framed by a shared structural pattern typical of the Shakespearean mode: the illumination of a tyrant's career through a series of subcycles about the vicissitudes of various lesser lives dependent on the major character who provides the nominal unity for the whole work. Thus Richard's character is illustrated and commented on from the start by circumstances in the fall of Clarence. Clarence is no more virtuous than Richard, perhaps even more treacherous in that he traitorously turned from Yorkist to Lancastrian whenever it suited his profit, and he led the way for Richard's own paradoxical marriage to the Lancastrian Anne by marrying her sister, also the daughter of the Earl of Warwick (who turned against the Yorkists after Edward's own injudicious marriage with Elizabeth Woodstock, the widow of another of his own opponents). However, if none of the three Yorkist brothers is better than greedy, ambitious, and self-indulgent, first Clarence and then Edward do come to understand their own failures and express repentance for them. The laborious scrutiny of conscience, which Clarence and his murderers all three undergo (I.iv), provides the context for our ultimate evaluation of Richard's own limitations. These are heightened by the further parallel fates of Rivers, Grey, Vaughan, Hastings, and Buckingham—all of whom come to appreciate their own guilt and express convincing repentance. While Anne Bullen may only nervously anticipate her future troubles, Richard's Anne finally achieves an extraordinary sense of her own self-inculpation when she recalls having cursed Richard's future wife before she herself fell prey to his seductions, "And prov'd the subject of mine own soul's curse." (IV.i.80). We are thus thoroughly conditioned to turn our moral judgment against Richard as he himself does in his climactic nightmare before the Battle of Bosworth Field.

This classic, cyclical, morality-play structure of the early histo-

ries is repeated in *Henry VIII*, with one major difference, that in the earlier play the progression is relentlessly violent until after the last, total reversal of Richmond's triumph and the founding of the Tudor dynasty. In the later play we see the earlier one's pattern closely recapitulated only in the first cycle, the fall of Buckingham, as confirmed by the frequent retrospective references noted earlier. Buckingham shares the hubris of the earlier play's Hastings, and learns similarly how dangerous friends and intimates can be. Yet the subsequent falls of both Katharine and Wolsey do not so closely follow the brutal model of *Richard III* but progress to more affirmative views of human character and fate. In one way, of course, Queen Katharine's fall is worse than Lady Anne's in that it is wholly undeserved, as everyone admits. However, unlike her Shakespearean predecessor, Lady Anne, and her successor, Katharine will not be murdered or executed. While she may be treated condescendingly by the cardinals, her excellence is universally affirmed and her death is preceded by a kind of apotheosis in the masque (IV.ii.82ff.) which sanctifies her virtues with a heavenly vindication visible to the audience. We are made to feel that whatever she may have suffered on earth, she transcends her circumstances and may fairly hope to be compensated for them by heavenly rewards.

A very similar apotheosis also unexpectedly transfigures Wolsey, above all in Griffith's final vindication to Katharine of her enemy's virtues, which we see truly expressed in Wolsey's final reconciliation with his own defeat:

Never so truly happy, my good Cromwell.  
I know my self now, and feel within me  
A peace above all earthly dignities. (III.ii.377-79)

All that has been manifestly shown to be wrong with Wolsey is now balanced by the final favorable verdict of Griffith to which even his most legitimate enemies, such as Katharine (and hence, presumably, the audience also), must assent:

Whom I most hated living, thou hast made me,  
With thy religious truth and modesty,  
Now in his ashes honor. (IV.ii.73-75)

Thus the later history play moves much sooner to a positive

reading of the same kind of events than the early one did and this is where their obvious generic similarities serve to highlight certain basic differences which modify the pessimistic terminal effects so characteristic of the early versions of the genre. The transcendence of Tudor politics colors the whole second half of *Henry VIII* rather than just the last lines of the final scene, as in *Richard III*. As a result of Henry VIII's final mastery of the sinister intrigues with which his court has been rife, the triumph of Cranmer establishes a positive model for the kind of effective rule which can only be anticipated after the victory of Richmond at the end of *Richard III*, and is not fully demonstrated by the new King Henry VII (who, anyway, himself later murdered a rival prince incarcerated in the Tower. Audrey Wilson argues that Henry VII had the most to gain by the earlier murders of the Princes in the Tower usually ascribed to Richard III).<sup>20</sup> Thus it is only in *Henry VIII* that the virtues of Henry VII are factually established, by Buckingham's recapitulation of his generosity. But, as we know only too well, Henry VIII liked to kill young women as well as young men, and this leaves the end of the play about him with an ominous aura equivalent to that of *Henry V*'s Epilogue anticipating the tragic reign of Henry VI. The still living Queen Anne may not be present at the final christening in *Henry VIII*, but she inevitably exerts a ghostly (not to say ghastly) presence nevertheless, reminiscent of the other Queen Anne who haunts the last act of *Richard III*.

Both tyrants thus have exploitative relationships with women, masked by an outer affectation of puritanism and piety with which their actions grossly conflict. This compulsive trait had already appeared in the historical Richard, who was just as deeply preoccupied with the sexual vagaries of Mistress Shore as he is shown to be in the play (I.i.90-102, III.i.185, III.iv.70-76).<sup>21</sup> As staged in Legge's *Richardus Tertius*, the historical Richard forced her to do public penance for her promiscuity by being paraded through the streets of London dressed only in a penitential sheet (which apparently served to win her pity and further admiration for her charms). Richard's

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<sup>20</sup> Audrey Wilson, *The Mystery of the Princes* (Gloucester, U.K.: Alan Sutton, 1981), 61, 128.

<sup>21</sup> Hugh M. Richmond, "Richard III and the Reformation," *JEGP* 83 (1984): 509-21.



contempt for his brother's sensuality, as shown in the affair with the widowed Lady Elizabeth Woodville, provides the basis for his radical alienation from his family in the famous speech where his wickedness is first fully formulated (3 *Henry VI*, III.ii.124-95), and his contempt for men dominated by women provides the later launching point for his trajectory which begins in the opening speech of *Richard III*. Yet much of Richard's energy in the play is devoted to seducing women to his own purposes, one way or another.

There is scarcely any necessity to document further the same pattern of sexual excesses in the historical Henry VIII, but it may need a more careful demonstration to confirm the complex recurring patterns in Shakespeare's ironic display of the discrepancy between Henry's affected reform of the extravagances in his own court, including Wolsey's, and his own indecorous behavior. "The new proclamation / That's clapp'd upon the court-gate" (I.iii.17-18) reminds us of the new order Angelo seeks to impose on the corrupt Vienna of *Measure for Measure*.<sup>22</sup> The effects of Henry's naive attempt at "reformation of our travel'd gallants" (I.ii.19) are seen to be as repressive as Angelo's, giving great satisfaction to the conservative court faction:

They must either,  
For so run the conditions, leave those remnants  
Of fool and feather that they got in France,  
With all their honorable points of ignorance  
Pertaining thereunto, as fights and fireworks,  
Abusing better men than they can be  
Out of a foreign wisdom, renouncing clean  
The faith they have in tennis and tall stockings,  
Short blist' red breeches, and those types of travel,  
And understand again like honest men,

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<sup>22</sup> *Measure for Measure* itself probably partly derives from the historical attitudes of King James I: see John Wilders, "The Problem Plays," in *Shakespeare: A Bibliographical Guide*, New Edition, Stanley Wells, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 152. However, such scholars should also have noted the failed efforts at municipal reform set specifically in sixteenth-century Vienna of yet another historical monarch, the Emperor Maximilian II, who shared an ambivalent taste for Reformation views with Henry VIII and James I, not to mention Henri IV. See Hugh M. Richmond, *Puritans and Libertines: Anglo-French Literary Relations in the Reformation* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1981), 65.



Or pack to their old playfellows. There, I take it,  
 They may, "cum privilegio," "oui" away  
 The lag end of their lewdness and be laugh'd at.  
 'Tis time to give 'em physic, their diseases  
 Are grown so catching. What a loss our ladies  
 Will have of these trim vanities! (I.iii.23-38)

The questionable political outcome of formal puritanism is another compulsively recurrent theme of Shakespeare's histories—of which Henry V's repudiation of Falstaff is only the most obvious example. Similar puritanism underlies the political failures of Henry VI, not to mention the misfortunes of Marcus Brutus. In such episodes Shakespeare surely remains as concerned to show the inadequacies of puritan reformers as he was with the equally erratic and equally historical court of the King of Navarre in *Love's Labor's Lost*, in which a sophisticated bevy of ladies totally overthrows male asceticism. The masquing of Shakespeare's King of Navarre is as morally questionable as the masquing of his King of England, Henry VIII, and it leads as directly to the emotional subservience of a king to a skeptical mistress. Indeed, there is some evidence to show that the Frenchified sophistication (Wyatt's "newfangledness"), which Anne Boleyn learned at the French court, is directly derived from the same proto-feminist origins as that of the historical models for the French princess and her ladies in *Love's Labor's Lost*.<sup>23</sup> For the court of Francis I provided the glittering model for the account of the Field of the Cloth of Gold at the start of *Henry VIII*, and the values and manners of this court were defined and dominated by the personality of his sister, Marguerite, Queen of Navarre. Marguerite advanced female status and autonomy at the court of King Francis, whose *petite bande* of dashing young women provided role models for the later *escadron volant* of Catherine de'Medici (herself trained by Marguerite), several of whom appear under their own names in *Love's Labor's Lost*. Moreover, that original Marguerite is precisely "the Duchess of Alençon, / The French King's sister" whom Shake-

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<sup>23</sup> See Hugh M. Richmond, "Shakespeare's Navarre," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 43 (Summer 1979): 193-215; also Hugh M. Richmond, Chapter II: "Anne Boleyn and the French Fashion," and Chapter IX: "Shakespeare's France," in *Puritans and Libertines*.

spere shows Wolsey to be determined that Henry shall marry rather than her likely pupil, Anne (III.ii.85-89). For Anne's father was ambassador to France, and both she and her sister acquired their sophistication, which Henry found irresistible, during their adolescent years at the French court. Historians have even conjectured that Henry first saw Anne in the seductive train of Francis and Marguerite at the Field of the Cloth of Gold (see the reference in *Henry VIII*, I.i.23-26). Thus Shakespeare's portrait of Anne Bullen as yet another witty and seductive young woman in the French fashion can plausibly be seen as a further reversion to historical models provided by one of his earliest comedies, probably first written about the time of *Richard III*. Rather surprisingly this recurrence of the pert manners of witty Frenchwomen proves to be another persistent motif in the genre of the Shakespeare histories, for it also appears in the behavior of the youthful Marguerite of Anjou and the Countess of Auvergne (not to mention Joan of Arc) in *Henry VI*, as well as in that of her mother-in-law, the intensely amorous French Princess Katharine in *Henry V* who so attracts the hitherto sexually neuter Prince Hal/Henry V—he who had sneered so relentlessly at the uxoriousness of Hotspur and the fornications of Falstaff.<sup>24</sup>

This recurrent Shakespearean pattern of princely severity which is then itself proved grossly guilty of what it would reprehend provides the climax to Act 1 of *Henry VIII*, when Henry disports himself at Wolsey's ball, in the very next scene (I.iv) following the announcement of his "reformation" of his court. Though himself fantastically garbed for the masque, he soon reverts to indirect censure of Wolsey for extravagance and frivolity:

You hold a fair assembly; you do well, lord.  
You are a churchman, or, I'll tell you, Cardinal,  
I should judge you unhappily. (I.iv.87-90)

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<sup>24</sup> Historians assert it was Katharine's charm and passion for Henry V which ensured the inclusion of her marriage to the English king in the Treaty of Troyes. See Ralph A. Griffiths, *The Reign of King Henry VI* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1981), 16, 60-61. See also the analysis of her attitudes in Shakespeare's *Henry V* in Hugh M. Richmond, *Shakespeare's Political Plays* (New York: Random House, 1967), 176-77.

Yet, as we have seen, in the very next breath Henry asks eagerly: "What fair lady's that?" (I.iv.92) and then without hesitation he proceeds enthusiastically to her seduction, seemingly by way of intoxication:

By heaven, she is a dainty one.—Sweetheart,  
I were unmannerly to take you out,  
And not to kiss you....  
Lead in your ladies, ev'ry one.—Sweet partner,  
I must not yet forsake you.—Let's be merry,  
Good my Lord Cardinal. I have a dozen healths  
To drink to these fair ladies, and a measure  
To lead 'em once again, and then let's dream  
Whose best in favor. Let the music knock it.  
(I.iv.95-97, 104-9)

Having censured other males' self-indulgence and extravagance, the initially disguised king immediately himself begins a course of action leading to adultery, divorce, and the near ruin of that very Christendom of which he had once been hailed by the Pope as the defender against Luther. This is a betrayal of ecclesiastical commitment and theological values far worse than the merely private insincerity of the royal ascetic in *Love's Labor's Lost*, and therefore one much nearer to the metaphysical corruption of Shakespeare's Richard III. Thus, in plays as varied, yet historically derived, as *Love's Labor's Lost*, *Richard III*, *Measure for Measure*, *Henry IV* and *Henry VIII*, Shakespeare takes up the theme of all his histories: the affected moralism of various historical monarchs—seemingly in order to show their own inevitable subsequent lapses into sensuality. Yet though these may lead to public disasters in the short run, out of these dislocations may evolve a state of affairs which is possibly wiser, certainly more tolerant.

This is also the pattern in the earlier versions of the genre which we can more certainly perceive by the hindsight generated through a knowledge of *Henry VIII*. For the serene tone of *Henry VIII* proves far more reconciled to human vicissitudes even while tracing the same tragic cycles as *Richard III*. After all, Richard III's hypocrisy was hardly an anticipation of the Reformation, and the ending of Shakespeare's earlier history play shows us a world still governed by

the full rigor of medieval theology, which almost every victim in the play is required to concede that his fate properly displays. *Henry VIII*, by contrast, openly establishes its time as the dawn of a new Christian era, the Reformation, which stressed a theology based on reconciliation with universal human fallibility—just as we can see the anticipations of the dawn of Christianity itself in the revision of judgments made in that other late play, set in the pivotal reign of *Cymbeline*, with its repudiation of archaic and over-rigid Roman legalism and class-consciousness. This late Shakespearean concern with cultural shifts from a more rigorous to a more tolerant world view certainly reflect a more relaxed personal ethos on the part of the aging dramatist, as Kevin Billington, director of the BBC production, has observed: “For a protestant playwright in the early seventeenth century to write about a Catholic Spaniard as if she was a saint is astonishing. And absolutely fundamental to an understanding of the play is the belief that there is some reconciliation, you can actually face your maker. And through the suffering, through the deaths, through the complications the nation comes through to our new religion and our new queen.”<sup>25</sup>

The profound significance of this religious transformation can be confirmed by a look at the appended list of word-frequencies, which show both the strong affinities between *Richard III* and *Henry VIII*, and also their crucial divergence at this point of maximum resemblance, the central procedure for valid comparison as defined earlier in this essay by my comparative method of Syncretic Criticism. The words range over the field of the more obvious religious vocabulary which both plays exploit to a degree unshared by any other Shakespeare play. They share exceptionally heavy use of two classes of words: first, words overtly concerned with the individual’s interest in religion: *Christian, self, conscience, prayer*; second, highly affirmative words about moral attitudes or conditions: *charity, grace, blessed, amen*. What *Henry VIII* conspicuously does not share with *Richard III* is the latter’s sinister preoccupation with the negative side of religion in the form of such words as: *curse, despair, death, Hell*. Even seemingly positive words like *day* in *Richard III* suggest more specifically threatening aspects such as Doomsday, or the day on which a

<sup>25</sup> John Wilders, ed. *The Shakespeare Plays: Henry VIII* (New York: Mayflower, 1979), 27.



penalty falls due for breaking a contract, as admitted by Rivers, Grey, Vaughan, and Buckingham on their way to execution.

By contrast, in *Henry VIII* the falls of both Katharine and Wolsey are given positive conformations. Wolsey transforms his fall into a gain, corroborated by even his enemy Katharine at Griffith's instigation, while Katharine herself is given an apotheosis just short of a bodily assumption into heaven, for which there is no precedent in the earlier histories. This is precisely the kind of added motif in a genre which my comparative method is designed to detect. For such a mystical (or at least ceremonial) transcendence of mundane reality is a recurrent motif in all the later plays or so-called "romances," as with the magical recognition scenes which present transfigured mothers, and daughters preserved, at the end of *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale*, or the celestial intrusions that prefigure Posthumus' recovery of both Imogen and his own self-confidence in *Cymbeline*. Divine manifestations affirm their magical powers far more positively in these last plays than the earlier Shakespeare ventured to display. Only Buckingham's execution in *Henry VIII* looks back to the numerous fatalities of *Richard III*, which the later play avoids, though history provides enough examples if the dramatist wished for them.<sup>26</sup>

It is chiefly in these terms of a more affirmative interpretation of events, expressed in high rituals, that Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* diverges from his earlier experiments in the genre of historical drama. This gives the play crucial significance as the last which his colleagues specifically assigned to Shakespeare. By cutting short the ominous cycle of Henry VIII's reign at the exact point which ends the play's action and by leapfrogging over Henry's deplorable later years through Cranmer's prophecy of the happier reign of Elizabeth, Shakespeare implies we are free to read history providentially by hindsight. For the true outcome of so much confusion and evil is not the all-too-momentary graciousness of Henry,<sup>27</sup> but the inaugura-

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<sup>26</sup> I need hardly say that the word-frequency list confirms my resistance to the view that *Henry VIII* is ambivalent, ironic, and skeptical in its treatment of such characters, as argued by Judith H. Anderson, "Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*: the Changing Relation of Truth to Fiction," in *Biographical Truth: The Representation of Historical Persons in Tudor-Stuart Writing* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1984) and earlier by Lee Bliss, "The Wheel of Fortune and the Maiden Phoenix of Shakespeare's *King Henry VIII*," *ELH* 42 (1975): 1-25.

<sup>27</sup> I thus cannot accept the entirely positive reading of Henry's evolution in the play

tion of a new era, of which Elizabeth I later becomes the symbol for us as for Shakespeare. By asserting that *All Is True*, Shakespeare invites us to accept this hopeful reading of what he insists are historical facts, as stressed by the production history of this play, which is one of the few consistently performed in historically accurate costume—a characteristic which, again, it shares chiefly with *Richard III*. Over the centuries, actors and directors have correctly perceived the shared need for visual affinities to these scripts' historicism, another continuity between them. As some recent performances of *Richard III* have diverged from the melodramatic model of Cibber's adaptation of the play in favor of more thoughtful interpretations,<sup>28</sup> we may confidently expect that appreciation for the integrity of *Henry VIII* will similarly encourage such vindications of its artistic distinctiveness as appear in the introduction to the BBC edition of the video script. Thus *Henry VIII* should reappear in all its former glory as an example of how Shakespeare revived a seemingly decayed genre as his last dramatic exercise, freshly illuminated by a providential response to English history which matches the mystical mood of his other late plays. Such a distinctive, complex synchronization of *Henry VIII* with characteristics of both Shakespeare's early and late plays strengthens the likelihood that the script is entirely his handiwork. With such a conscious sense of this serener play's definitive completion of the troubled cycle that began with the chronicle histories of Shakespeare's early career, the dramatist seems to have discovered that: "in my beginning is my end."

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by Paul Bertram, "Henry VIII: The Conscience of the King," in Reuben Brower and Richard Poirier, eds., *In Defence of Reading: A Reader's Approach to Literary Criticism* (New York: Dutton, 1962), 153-73.

<sup>28</sup> See Hugh M. Richmond, *Shakespeare in Performance: King Richard III* (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester Univ. Press, 1989).

# SHAKESPEARE'S MAXIMUM FREQUENCIES OF WORDS BEARING ON *RICHARD III* AND THE BIBLE

WORD & RELATED VARIANTS	MOST USED IN		SECOND MOST		THIRD MOST	
1. God God's	<i>R III</i>	105	H V	70	ADO	66
2. holy	<i>R III</i>	22	R&J	21	JOHN	17
3. soul souls	<i>R III</i>	59	HAM	39	R II	35
4. Christian (& compounds)	<i>MV</i>	27	<i>H VIII</i>	16	<i>R III</i>	10
5. blood bloody	<i>R III</i>	64	JOHN	64	R II	44
6. fall	<i>R III</i>	17	(TNK	17)	<i>H VIII</i>	16
7. self	<i>R III</i>	9	<i>H VIII</i>	4	2G V	4
8. myself	<i>R III</i>	43	2H VI	27	2G V	25
9. conscience	<i>H VIII</i>	24	<i>R III</i>	13	H V	13
10. guilt guilty guiltless	<i>R III</i>	16	2H VI	12	HAM	10
11. just -ly unjust -ly	<i>R III</i>	12	ADO	12	2H IV	11
12. curse -s -ed -'d	<i>R III</i>	36	2H VI	13	1H VI	11
13. prophet prophecy -sy etc.	<i>R III</i>	12	1H VI	8	2H VI	4 - 3H VI
14. despair	<i>R III</i>	14	R II	6	3H VI	4
15. death dead -ly die	<i>R III</i>	147	R&J	143	2H VI	109
16. Hell -'s Hell- hellish	<i>R III</i>	17	1H VI	10	2H VI	9
17. day -s -'s	<i>R III</i>	63	R&J	54	H V	46
18. remorse remorse-ful	<i>R III</i>	4	JOHN	3	2H VI	3
19. repent -ant -ance etc.	<i>R III</i>	6	MfM	6	A&C	4
20. prayer -s praying	<i>H VIII</i>	13	<i>R III</i>	11	R II	6
21. mother	<i>R III</i>	41	COR	37	HAM	34
22. child -s children -'s	<i>R III</i>	35	JOHN	24	3H VI	18
23. charity charitable	<i>R III</i>	8	<i>H VIII</i>	7	MfM	5
24. grace gracious	<i>R III</i>	85	<i>H VIII</i>	57	2H VI	41
25. humble -ly humility etc.	<i>H VIII</i>	15	<i>R III</i>	11	OTH	9
26. bless -ed -es -ing -s etc.	<i>H VIII</i>	26	(TNK	17)	<i>R III</i>	16
27. Paul -'s Powles	<i>R III</i>	7	<i>H VIII</i>	1	1H IV	1 - 2H IV
28. amen	T&C	8	<i>R III</i>	7	<i>H VIII</i>	5

A. Most frequent of above in *R III*:

15. (death)	147
1. (God)	105
24. (grace)	85
20. (blood)	64

B. Closest in these distributions to *R III* = *H VIII*

C. Greatest discrepancy between *R III* use and next play's:

27. (Paul):	<i>H VIII</i> = 14%	3. (Hell):	1H VI = 59%
12. (curse):	2H VI = 36%	8. (myself):	2H VI = 62.8%
14. (despair):	R II = 42.9%	1. (God):	1H VI = 66.6%
7. (self):	<i>H VIII</i> = 44.4%	24. (grace):	<i>H VIII</i> = 67.1%

d. Sources: Marvin Spevack, *Harvard Concordance to Shakespeare*

T. H. Howard-Hill, *Oxford Shakespeare Concordances: Richard III*  
(Richmond: "Richard III and the Reformation," 21)

G. K. Hunter

## Notes on the Genre of the History Play

Is history a representation of the events which happened in the past or of the meaning of the events that happened? The *wie es eigentlich gewesen* idea of the historian's role is not much respected today. But if we allow the impossibility of the first of these alternatives we probably find ourselves only facing the unintelligibility of the second. If we opt for *meaning* we must ask what it is that confers the meaning, remembering the view that "As actions have a meaning because they are performed to achieve a certain goal, the historical process in its totality is the means of achieving a certain goal."<sup>1</sup> Are we to say that it is the march of progress that justifies the movement from past to present? Or does meaning derive from the revelation of some great good (less usually some great evil<sup>2</sup>) that unfolds in the course of time? Or is history a set of lessons that shows us how some

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<sup>1</sup> F. R. Ankersmit, "Historical Representation," *History and Theory* 27 (1988): 207.

<sup>2</sup> The obvious use of this paradigm in drama is in the presentation of Roman history. But as *Sejanus* and *Catiline* and *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* all indicate, the breakdown of Roman civility into imperial tyranny inevitably requires the historical sequence to be understood in terms of personal tragedy.



actions lead to success and others to disaster? And in that case, what is the status of "success?"

I ask these large questions in no hope of discovering any answer let alone devising one. My purpose is only to set up a framework within which I can consider the interaction of event and meaning, the local and the general, in Shakespeare's history plays. These are plays which probably owe their great popularity to the strong sense of the contingent or immediate quality of the life they show us. Falstaff, Fluellen, Falconbridge, Bates and Williams, the gardeners in *Richard II*, the murderers in *Richard III*, famously counterpoint the intentionality of those around them (for plays are bound to plot a process of achieving general meanings) by asserting contingency as the human feature that links past to present and so talks to us directly. In this they are faithful to the Chronicle model of history as (among other things) a panorama of diverse happenings.<sup>3</sup> But these anti-systematic characters could not exercise their charm so effectively if they did not appear inside the systems they draw on or react to, and the relation would be too simple if the system was merely opposite to or disconnected from the random happenings inside it. The Larger Purposes of history, the search for ideals and distant horizons, are most effective in their relation to real lives if they can open up the general question of *meaning* (or "making sense") to skeptical interrogation by the short-term interests of the individuals caught in its process.

As every schoolboy knows, J. Dover Wilson and E. M. W. Tillyard have interpreted the sequence of eight history plays that Shakespeare devised (and must have self-consciously devised) as a reflection of the pattern of meaning found in Hall's *Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York*, a pattern showing the loss of dynastic legitimacy by the deposition of Richard II and its recovery by the succession of Henry VII. In these terms the *meaning* of the history enacted is created by the value given to royal legitimacy and the divine favor thought to be attached to it. The meaning, that is, emerges as a confirmation of the political values that the monarchical government of the time required. And so

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<sup>3</sup> See G. K. Hunter, "Truth and Art in History Plays," *Shakespeare Survey* 42 (1989): 15-24.

it has been treated as a merely *imposed* meaning (which Shakespeare may or may not have believed in). In either case the meaning is devalued as a mere propaganda stunt. But the pattern found in Hall and Shakespeare need not be limited to this particular realization of its structure. It reflects in fact a much grander pattern of fall and recovery, given its most pervasive presence in the Christian story of paradise lost in Eden and paradise regained in the second coming and the reign of the saints. This is a piece of theology that Shakespeare could not be expected to handle in any direct way, for reasons of theatrical tact no less than censorship. But it was very much part of the air that was breathed in that age, by author no less than audience, and one must assume that the sense of time that pervades the history plays could not be wholly detached from the meaning that God's time imposed on the culture.<sup>4</sup>

At the very least we must assume that Shakespeare wrote history plays (more than any other author of the period) with the conscious intention of relating past events to the historical present, thus fulfilling Jörn Rüsen's observation, confirmed by Nashe and Heywood,<sup>5</sup> that history makes its effect of "formulating human identity by mobilizing the forces of historical memory."<sup>6</sup> He began his career by compiling a series of four plays which came as close to his own time as prudence would allow; and when Elizabeth was dead he brought the series further up to date by writing a play about her father. In the middle of his career he returned to the sequence he had already written and expanded it by pushing the story back to its dynastic origin in the seven sons of Edward III, picking up once again the religious precedents in King John's abortive effort to replace Popish domination by national unity. Expanding the story backwards created problems for the grand design that holds the sequence together (and may have been intended from the beginning). In the first-written tetralogy the descent of Henry VII as *deus ex machina* created an effective climax; and the same finale was equally

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<sup>4</sup> See Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (1967) for an illuminating discussion of the relation between narrative time and God's time.

<sup>5</sup> See Hunter, "Truth and Art," pp. 15-16.

<sup>6</sup> Jörn Rüsen, "Historical Narration: Foundation, Types, Reason," *History and Theory*, Beiheft 26 (1987): 96

effective as a culmination for all eight plays. But the beginning of *Henry VI*, with expulsion from the paradise of the hero-king Henry V, poses problems of alignment when pushed against the end of the second-written tetralogy. For now there is superimposed on the original pattern a sequence in which Henry V plays the part of *deus ex machina*. How could Henry appear in a continuous story as both the agent of restoration and as part of the fallen world that precedes the second coming? Only, one has to admit, by finessing the relationship of the parts: and it should be allowed that the nature of the history play leaves it usefully open to such finessing.

On one level we can see that the *Richard II-Henry V* sequence is designed to repeat the structure of the *Henry VI-Richard III* one. The former begins with evocation of the paradisaical unity of England embodied in the "sacred blood" of the strong Edward III and then falls into family quarrels (in the mode of Cain and Abel). The latter begins with lamentation for the strong Henry V "too famous to live long" (as the Prologue to *Henry VI* so curiously puts it) and then falls into family quarrels. The lethal combination of French perfidy and a politically ambitious church (central in *King John*) passed from *Henry VI* (Margaret and Beaufort) to *Henry V* (The Dauphin, Canterbury and Ely) though in a form which can be handled with comic insouciance in the short term but has catastrophic consequences in the long term (as the Epilogue makes clear).

The radical break in this Epilogue between the continuity of history by which "Henry the Sixt, in infant bands crowned King / Of France and England, did this king succeed" (9-10) and the merely contingent relation set up between *Henry V* and the *Henry VI* sequence, in which the theatrical success of one will encourage spectators to like the other, seems to mark Shakespeare's sense of the strain that the double structure imposed at this hinge-point of the two tetralogies. The concluding triumph of Henry VII raises no such problems, for Henry VII exists on only one plane: he has historical meaning as the angel of deliverance, but no contingent personality. But Henry V must carry a double burden: he is exposed in full frontal focus as the agent of both success and failure, strength of character and weakness of historical destiny. Shakespeare handles him with extraordinary ambiguity. On the one hand he is a puppet manipulated by wily churchmen who can "draw the pliant king which way they please" (cf. Marlowe, *Edward II* I.i.53)—even when



their aim is the abhorrent one of avoiding secular taxation on church revenues. On the other hand he is a self-propelled hero. On the one hand he rescues the country from the unquiet time of Henry IV; on the other hand he bequeaths it to the even quieter time of Henry VI. On the one hand he is the object of the Chorus's uncritical adulation; on the other he is, for Bates and Williams, something of a self-interested dynastic adventurer. On the one hand he is steadfast and loyal: on the other he has left the heart of Falstaff "fracted and corroborate" (*Henry V* II.i.124). On the one hand he has a Christian mission to claim his rights in France; on the other hand he is only following his father's Machiavellian advice to "busy giddy minds / With foreign quarrels" (2 *Henry IV* IV.v.213-14). The ideal of creating national meaning by pointing to England's manifest destiny is both validated and undercut. But the contradiction is handled here with a fluent lightness of touch that discounts the idea of failure; the fall is not now, as in the first tetralogy, into tragic alienation, but rather into the double-takes of comedy. The reader with a sense of the whole sequence is, however, allowed to construe the "triumph" at the end of *Henry V* as a magnificent but failed attempt to secure an ideal destiny for the kingdom for which God's time was not ripe and which therefore has to be accommodated to the deferral characteristic of fallen time.

Does the existence of a total pattern in Shakespeare's history plays mean that the author saw (or wished others to see) the coming of the Tudors as paradise regained, as the unique apocalypse that history had been waiting for? Is this the "idealism" that I spoke about at the beginning of this paper, that gives shape to the accumulated progression of events through time? There is no evidence that we should think so positively, and the success of the history plays in foreign countries and later periods suggests that the idealism of the pattern is sustaining even when there is no belief in or even understanding of the Tudor succession. The culminating victory of Richmond over Richard III is a victory which allows abstractness of meaning to triumph over the rich particularity of contingent experience.<sup>7</sup> And therefore in theatrical terms it is an ambiguous triumph, buying ideals at the expense of reality and so requiring us to respond

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<sup>7</sup> To see the contingent consequences of Henry VII's devotion to the healing process we have to turn to Ford's *Perkin Warbeck*.



with divided minds. In Robert Weimann's terms, the Tudors are allowed to dominate the *locus* but the last of the Plantagenets has a clear command of the *platea*, where contingency reigns: his is the politics of the common life we all know, sharply prescient of immediate advantage, snatching at whatever is in front of him, but too caught up in the tangle of particulars to understand the shape of the future. Seeing him, we recognize the life around us. And yet, even so, even under the spell of his presence, we still hunger for something that promises greater permanence, for something that points to more idealistic ends. A Henry VII, even though we do not know who he is, suspicious of his "goodness" as we may be, might just be the saviour who will give long-term meaning to experience.



If these are the terms in which history plays negotiate the relation between idealism and fact, meaning and event, how far does the genre definition that follows determine the status of the history play in any overall map of dramatic kinds? Consider the relation with tragedy. One way of testing that would be to look at the mixture of idealism and politics in the story of Richard II as a "tragic hero." Another possibility, less worked over, is to set Hal as a plotter, as a moral suspect (and so, in a history play, capable of becoming a hero) against a tragic plotter like Iago. *Othello* is in fact a very interesting play to read alongside the history sequence, for its source, the seventh novel of the third decade in Giambattista Giraldis Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*, shows many of the same features of factual detail and evasive continuity as appear in the English chronicles; the processes by which these incoherences are turned into coherent plots show interesting similarities and differences between the two cases.

Like other novelle, Cinthio's story of the Moor, the Ensign and the Captain links a naturalistic world of petty crime and random violence to an overall assumption that God is watching the world and will in the end assert idealistic standards by imposing appropriate punishment on crime. The key phrase in this description is "in the end": the first thing that strikes a reader coming from *Othello* to Cinthio is the stop-and-start randomness of the story's development. What we have is indeed far more a series of events than a plot. In the

first (and by far the longest) episode the murder of Disdemona is achieved by the close cooperation of the Moor and the Ensign. They are pleased with their success; the supposed adulteress has been punished and the murderers are not suspected. Then, after an undisclosed passage of time, the Moor begins to regret the loss of his wife and blames the Ensign. The Ensign then repeats the move that had brought him success in episode one: he incites the Captain against the Moor, indicating that he is the person responsible for the wound that left the Captain a cripple (and also incidentally for the death of Disdemona). The Captain accuses the Moor; the Venetians torture him to test the truth of the charge, but he survives the ordeal and is merely banished. But Disdemona's family cannot be satisfied so easily and at some time indeterminately later they have him assassinated. More time passes. In the final episode we find the Ensign caught up in yet another (totally unrelated) affair. Again he makes a false accusation. Again the person accused is tortured and again no confession can be obtained. Now it is the Ensign's turn; he is put to the torture to test the truth of his charge. But by accident the screw is turned too tight and *gli si corropero le interiora*—his bowels burst.

The one thing that holds this series of episodes together is the Ensign's use of slander. But we are not told why the Ensign operates in this way. We follow his actions as we follow newspaper reports of one crime after another, or as we follow chronicle accounts of the events in a single year: we learn the facts, but we do not know how they can be fitted into a framework of meaning. When the Ensign meets what we are clearly meant to think of as his deserts we must understand that a force not us, making for righteousness, is to be held responsible.<sup>8</sup> The moral that he who keeps telling lies will eventually be found out may look rather trite, but apparently it is what Cinthio intended. He tells us that the purpose of his stories is to "make men fly from vice and embrace virtue." The apparent randomness of the connections in the *Othello* story is in fact further proof of the divine concern: we think we can hide ourselves in the disconnectedness of experience, but God does not lose track of the connections and by His acts we can eventually understand how it all fits together.

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<sup>8</sup> "tal fece Iddio vendetta della innocenza di Disdemona."

Connectedness in the mind of God does not, however, give the working dramatist a definition of meaning that is much help when he tries to turn such material into a plot. He can only achieve his end if he develops the consequences by different kinds of relationship, by the interconnection of *human* motives, so that behind the apparent discontinuities (as seen by the Venetian envoys in *Othello*) we understand not so much the unity of the divine perception as the unification of human possibility found in the focus of different understandings on the same object. We understand the entirely plausible confusion of "one that loved not wisely but too well" seeing it as part of a unified spectrum of human characteristics. We understand the pathos of a search for unity in evidence that triumphs only by understanding the unity of the self ("speak of me as I am" [V.ii.351])—a unity achieved by knowing the limits of the possible ("I look down towards his feet; but that's a fable" [V.ii.294]). And we understand these things because we have been given an internalized pattern of good and evil that holds everything in place, in a plot so exactly constructed that interior motive and external event are matched with micrometer accuracy.

We may think of this matching as reflecting only the logic of contrived coincidence; but the fact that the coincidence belongs to art and not to nature should not disturb us; for the whole point of Shakespeare's recasting of Cinthio is to bring into nature some of the artful pattern-making that Cinthio (and Holinshed) reserve for God. And to create this effect Shakespeare has to find in Cinthio's world of short-term interests and predatory advantage-taking a touch of God-like idealism inside human nature, a belief in an overall meaning that can support love and faith, where the loss of such support is not simply a misfortune but a defacing of the divine image. And this, I suppose, we are meant to recognize as a truth about human nature.

Cinthio's is a story largely without political dimension. The Venetian state tries to deal with crime in the only way it knows how, but its efforts are notably inefficient. Disdemona's family can only find justice in personal revenge, in the tried and tested mode of the *vendetta*. The Ensign expertly evades punishment and dies only by an accident (alias the mysterious workings of providence). And Shakespeare, we should notice, makes no effort to enlarge the political meaning. The Venetian senate sends Othello to defeat the Turks,



but the storm does that work for them. After a short time they recall him and appoint Cassio governor of Cyprus in his place. Why they do so is not explained, and we are not prompted to brood over the issue. For such events are only framing devices. The real story fills the interstices of the political action but has very little connection with it. Iago claims that Othello's is a political appointment and that it is his own low social status that requires him to claw his way upward by any means available. But his pleasure in advancement to lieutenant is incidental to his hunger to destroy. The central relationships of the play are, we might say, "merely personal." And it is the tightness of the "merely personal" that creates the inescapable pressure and procures the inevitability of the tragic development. Idealism and worldliness, love and hate, creativity and destructiveness, openness and secrecy are layered one on another so that meaning emerges not from an "eventually discoverable" pattern as in *Cinthio* but moment by moment in our perception of what the play itself calls "a daily beauty" (V.i.19).

As I have noted, the loose-joined narrative style of *Cinthio* is not unlike that of the *Chronicles*, and Shakespeare's response to this quality in the *Chronicles* is not in general unlike his response to *Cinthio*: he seeks to create specific though complex interrelations out of the narrative evasiveness of their "real life" stories, turning parataxis into hypotaxis and in all cases requiring the events to implicate a future that will explain their meaning. But where in tragedy this process is based on compression, steadily paring down the range of possibilities so that we end on a central focusing confrontation (*Othello* and Iago, *Hamlet* and Claudius, Brutus and the ghost of Caesar, *Macbeth* and Malcolm-Macduff, *Coriolanus* and Volumnia), in history plays the process is one that leads not to closure but to augmentation and substitution (hence the scope for finessing noted above). The final face-off of Hal and Falstaff at the end of 2 *Henry IV* is not a contest between good and evil; it produces realignment rather than destruction. In rejecting this alternative father-figure, as in escaping from the pressure of his real father, Hal secures a realignment with the whole of society, negotiates his move from time-free contingency to timely meaning. But of course we know that history cannot be corralled in this way, that the effort of kings to impose themselves on us as the causes why everything happens (in the *de*



*vita et gestis* mode) cannot be the whole story. The function of the history play to maintain the Chronicle's popular image of the national past as a scene of uncoordinated variety (just like the national present) requires that its future keeps opening up new possibilities instead of closing them down: "the king is dead; long live the king."

A. R. Braunmuller has noted how in *King John* the Bastard can become the agent of Shakespeare's rewriting of Holinshed without ever having to contradict Holinshed.<sup>9</sup> He functions, in the terms I am using, to change the meaning without changing the events. It is easy to see that Falstaff performs a similar function, rephrasing history's political story as a personal one and operating as a diversifying double for Henry IV as Hotspur is rejuvenated to serve as a double for Hal. In neither case, we should notice, is the double present in the play to mark the distance between good and bad, right and wrong. The point about diversification is in fact to avoid such categorizing. The tavern in Eastcheap serves as a parodic counterpart to the royal court, but it does not do so inside any moralizing hierarchy. Its picture of the inescapable contingency of ordinary life gives it an independent truth. Hal's function is to straddle this genuine contradiction, even while he is aiming to evade it. Iago confronts Othello's officer-class idealism with a sergeant's cynical reality, so that he can destroy it. Hal tries to absorb the anti-idealism of everyday life into a political idealism that must try to co-exist with the world of compromise.

In what is probably the most celebrated scene in the history plays (1 *Henry IV*, I.ii) we see Hal operating in a mode as close to Iago's as he ever comes. His soliloquy "I know you all ..." (I.ii.189-211) represents a shift from lively participation into a cold contemplation of the benefits (political benefits in this case) that will accrue when he chooses to betray the scene of fellowship we have just witnessed. But the betrayal carries little of the moral charge that attaches to Iago. Both the fellowship and the betrayal must be judged in political terms. All the personal assertions in the exchanges between Hal and Falstaff are calculated to create opportunities for political advantage in the future, for Falstaff is as keen to make political profit out of Hal as Hal is to make a killing out of Falstaff.

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<sup>9</sup> "King John and Historiography," *ELH* 55 (1988): 309-32.

The financial images are entirely appropriate, as each considers the other as an investment calculated in terms of yield. The political context of the play thus pulls against the centripetal pressure of tragedy, which carries us down to a place where the future does not matter, where we are forced into complicity, required to take sides, made to enact with our own emotions the struggle for ideals that is taking place. In history plays the material is less sharply focused. We watch the gamble on the future with only a tenuous hold on the ideals of good government and national prosperity that are talked about, for we are made continuously aware of the uncertain link that binds proposals to achievements. The ideal of the good society is more tangible than the ideals that tragedy invokes, but by being tangible it stands outside us as a general idea. It cannot be incorporated into our sense of self as can the idealisms of tragedy, which affect us not as concepts but as experiences. In a hybrid play like *Richard II* we can see how the two focuses interact. Richard's struggle with Bolingbroke, though less purely political than those in *Henry IV*, lacks the isolation, the intense particularity of tragic engagement. But at the end of the play, when the political dimension has become irrelevant to him, Richard in isolation can communicate some sense of how a meaningful individual life is to be judged, though in a world that can be dreamed about but not engaged with. At the same time the world of perpetual postponement of the political good grinds forward; its limitations, its reliance on hope, its "fallen" condition are amply illustrated by Henry IV's frustrated attempts to achieve order, system, forgiveness.

It is an assumed condition of academic discourse that it seeks validation in "truth." And so universities have departments of history but not of story. Yet the two words are, as every European language informs us, twins that belong together, "history" being the severe and consequential ugly sister, "story" the downgraded Cinderella figure that we might like to choose but dare not justify, being "merely anecdotal," as academic jargon has it. The history play lives somewhere in the middle of this distinction. It is, like comedy and tragedy, a story about people; but its characters from history differ from those in the other genres in that they claim to belong to our real past and to be part of the story that explains who we are. They cannot be separated from the historical movements in the worlds

they inhabit. Their personal energies must be directed towards making use of these changes; their eyes are carried beyond the supporters and opponents they have to deal with to a vision of a future in which things can be made different. Such expectations are perpetually disappointed, the ideals are postponed, but we recognize the necessary truth of the engagement with time that such hope involves, the psychological need to believe that the ideal is connected to an external and provable reality. The idea that history leads forward to meaning (like a story) may be a fiction, but it is a necessary fiction. It is often said that our attention to fiction depends on a "willing suspension of disbelief." If this is so then the history play is the supreme example of this capacity, for the suspension is one we practice every time we invoke the past or contemplate the future.

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